Sparking Change

Children's Right to Protest:

A Perspective from Children and Young Activists













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Foreword from the Spark Club

“Why protest?” you ask yourself. “No matter what you do, nothing will change”, people tell you. “Everything is the same at the end of the day”. But is it?

A group of children and young people from all around the world may have a lot of differences, but we have one thing in common: we don’t like the world as it is right now, and we want to change it. Brought together by Amnesty International, we are the Spark Club, a group of children aged between 11 and 17 from 12 countries across five continents.[1] From September 2025 until July 2026, we worked with Amnesty International to gather the experiences of young people and children from the four corners of the globe through a questionnaire, focus group discussions called Spark Circles and interviews, which led to the creation of this report.

To us, taking part in the Spark Club was both a thought-provoking and worthwhile experience that changed the way we think about the right to protest for children and young people. It was amazing to engage in discussions with children and young people around the world and to see the similarities we share in taking action.

Taking action is, first of all, collective. It means connecting with other children and young people, learning, exchanging ideas, and being a part of something bigger than yourself. You can take action by joining a protest in the streets, making a sign, posting online, speaking up in your class, educating yourself, helping others, and infinite more ways. You are never alone! Taking action also means making new friends, encouraging friends and family to join you and being in contact with other human beings.

Changing the world might seem quite a clichéd concept, it may look really far away from reality, but it’s closer than it seems. Every little action we take contributes to shaping our world, in which young voices need to be included and listened to. We have ideas, concerns and plans.

We’re not responsible for all of the things past generations have done. We are also not responsible for what governments do. But we have the obligation to not stay quiet as we see our future being taken away from us every day. The world we live in is very unequal, and every country has a lot of challenges and injustices of its own. As many of us take action on different issues, every activist has one thing in common: a desire to leave the world a fairer and more inclusive space, where everyone’s rights are uplifted and protected and young people are active participants in shaping change.

This is a call to action for governments and companies to listen to young people and act on their demands, for parents and others to support children taking action, and for children and young people to feel capable and confident to act on the issues that matter to them.

Lur (17, Argentina) and Niamh (17, Ireland), on behalf of the Spark Club.

[1] Spark Club members were from Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Palestine, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Africa and South Korea.

Acknowledgements

Amnesty International would like to thank all of the children and young people who took part in this research. Firstly, to the 15 wonderful Spark Club members, for their passion, candor and commitment to this research, for sharing their ideas, co-facilitating Spark Circles (focus group discussions), for shaping the **manifesto for change** and providing feedback on this report. Their insights were central to shaping both the process and the findings of the research, and this work would not have been possible without their generous and thoughtful contributions throughout.

We would also like to thank the many children and young people who filled in the questionnaire, took time to join a Spark Circle or participated in interviews, as well as those who joined listening exercises early in the process.[2] We are so grateful for the personal stories and experiences you shared.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the partners and organizations which supported this research, in particular the CIVICUS civil society alliance and Defence for Children International – Palestine.






[2] To support the design of the research, Amnesty International held 15 interviews with organizations, activists and academics, producing the internal report *Protect the Protest: Children's Rights to Protest Global Project – Listening Exercise Report.*

Executive Summary

In recent years, children around the world have led and participated in major protests demanding climate justice, racial equality, social justice and better education, among other things. Children's vital involvement in activism and protest has revealed gaps in how states respect, protect and facilitate children's rights to protest. Children, like adults, have the right to voice their concerns, put forward demands, and be able and enabled to participate in society, including by being able to protest safely and without discrimination. What is more, children's right to freedom of peaceful assembly is important for their personal development, their participation in political and public affairs, and for catalysing local, national and global change.[3]

With an intersectional approach in mind, this report – as part of Amnesty International's Children's Right to Protest Project – sheds light on some of the barriers, challenges and human rights abuses experienced by children and youth when exercising their right to protest. It also showcases some of the strategies and approaches which enable them to successfully protest, and highlights their wishes and hopes for children exercising their right to protest in the future.



[3] UNICEF, *Free and Safe to Protest: Policing Assemblies Involving Children*, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/reports/free-and-safe-protest

Methodology

For the purposes of this research, we define children as under the age of 18, and youth participants / young people as people between the ages of 18 and 24.

We have used four methods to hear from child and youth activists: an online questionnaire, Spark Circles, interviews and the Spark Club. We also carried out desk research.

1. An online questionnaire allowed for voluntary, experiential accounts of children and young people who chose to respond. A total of 517 people responded and their self-reported ages were 13 to 24.

2. Spark Circles (focus group discussions) gave us a chance to hear more deeply from children and youth activists through voluntary, small group discussions. They included 19 children and 18 youth activists, plus one adult (who joined a discussion with youth aged over 18).

3. Three interviews took place with a total of five children aged nine to 13 with experience of protesting (two interviews with two children and one with one child).

4. The Spark Club was formed by Amnesty International and brought together a group of 15 child and youth activists aged 11 to 17 (at the time of joining the Spark Club) from 12 different countries.[4] They shared ideas for the questionnaire, created graphics that were used by Spark Club members and Amnesty national entities to spread the word about the research, co-facilitated Spark Circles, talked through the findings, and helped to create the final report.

5. Desk research enabled us to understand and present the background and contextual information for this research.

To centre children in the research design, we worked with the Spark Club throughout the entire research process. Nonetheless, some limitations remain, including having heard from more young people than children overall. We aimed to mitigate this challenge by using a range of research methods, which allowed us to prioritize the participation of children in the Spark Club, the Spark Circles (to some extent) and in interviews, boosting children's participation and perspectives in the research. We acknowledge the limitations of geographic representation, with some countries or regions being more represented than others, as well as possible constraints because children may not have been able to participate in the available languages. We sought to address this by balancing out geographic participation across research methods, using the Spark Circles, the Spark Club and the interviews to include children from countries that were not represented in the questionnaire responses.

[4] Spark Club members were from Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Palestine, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Africa and South Korea. Participation varied across meetings: while not all members attended every session, each meeting included between three and six participants. Some members were more active than others throughout the process.

Background

Children are among the groups of people identified by international and regional human rights treaties as requiring special attention and protection, including in the context of protests. Several human rights instruments recognize children's rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.[5] Two key human rights treaties which do this are:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The CRC – one of very few international treaties with almost universal ratification – defines children as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."[6] For the purposes of this research, we define a child as a person under 18 years of age.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Article 21 of the ICCPR recognizes the right to freedom of peaceful assembly for every person without discrimination. The CRC's Article 15 echoes this principle, affirming that state parties must recognize the right of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Despite these protections, Amnesty International has documented numerous instances of children's right to protest being restricted, denied or violated. Many states have failed both to recognize and to afford children the additional protections to which they are entitled during protests. Children have been shamed, attacked, punished or threatened with punitive measures for standing up for their rights. They have been unlawfully arrested and detained, and have suffered violence and even been killed at the hands of security forces.



[5] UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General Comment No 37 (2020) on the Right of Peaceful Assembly (Article 21), 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 80; Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee), Comments on Human Rights Committee's Revised Draft General Comment No. 37 on Article 21 (Right of Peaceful Assembly) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 21 February 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CCPR/GCArticle21/EXPERTS_CRC.pdf p. 7.

[6] UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 1.

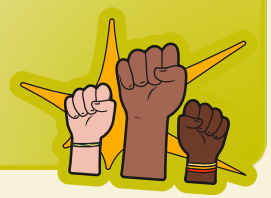
Findings

The findings show that, while children are motivated to participate in protest and believe they can contribute to change, their ability to do so depends on the support, protection and opportunity available to them. The key findings below highlight both the factors that enable children's participation and the barriers that can hinder it.

KEY FINDING 1:

Children are hopeful that their protest can drive change despite feeling they are taken less seriously.

Through the research we found that, overall, children feel hopeful about their ability to affect change through protest and feel empowered by their protest experiences. This also resonated with the young people who participated in the research. We also found that, when reflecting on their hopes and wishes for the future of protest, children greatly stressed their desire and need to be listened to, to have their demands met, and to see action from duty-bearers in response to their protest efforts and their activism. While this was something that youth activist participants also expressed, it was overwhelming among child research participants, some of whom also mentioned specifically that they are taken less seriously because they are children, and that they feel this situation must change.



KEY FINDING 2:

Supportive relationships strengthen children's confidence and willingness to protest, while negative attitudes can deter participation.

Children and young people alike stressed the importance of having people in their lives who support them and their activism. Through the questionnaire, we discovered that a range of people provide support to child and youth activists. In the Spark Circles and interviews, many children specifically described how their parents have been instigators and/or facilitators of their activism. While the importance of parental support resonated with young people, it was somewhat less common than among children. Children also stressed that negative perceptions, attitudes and narratives about protest can dissuade them from protesting (something which also resonated with young people).



KEY FINDING 3:

Safety is a major concern for many children who wish to protest and many fear violence from law enforcement and the possibility of arrest.

Safety is a major concern for many child activists. Although experiences and perceptions of safety vary a lot across regions, children and young people repeatedly raised safety concerns throughout the research, and experiences of abuses or fears of violence or abuse were mentioned by many children. Some participants described avoiding in-person protests entirely because of fear of violence, arrest or conflict, or stated that their parents would not allow them to join out of fear of violence. In the questionnaire we asked respondents about their biggest barriers to protest and in their responses the possibility of violence from police/law enforcement (which was a barrier for 216 of out 468 respondents) and the possibility of arrest (which was a barrier for 208 out of 468 respondents) were the two most common responses. Issues around safety came up both when we asked about barriers to participation, and also when we asked what children hope will change in the future. This all resonated strongly with young people, for whom safety was also a major concern (indeed, even more prevalent than for children).



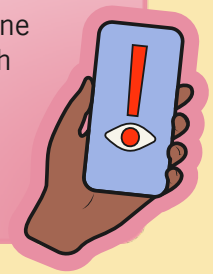
KEY FINDING 4:

While children reported overall to feel safer during online forms of protest, concerns about the collection and misuse of their personal data and online harassment continue to present significant barriers to their activism.

Children shared with us how online protest can open up opportunities for activism which would not be possible for them otherwise; and, for many, online spaces have enabled child and youth activists to connect with others and learn in relation to their activism.

Research participants also reported feeling far safer protesting online than offline. Of the questionnaire respondents most (264 out of 347) reported feeling safe protesting online compared to just 126 out of 288 who reported feeling safe protesting offline. Both online and offline, the young people who responded to the questionnaire reported feeling somewhat less safe protesting compared to child respondents.

Nonetheless, children also spoke of the major drawbacks and challenges of online protest, such as mass surveillance, misuse of their personal data and online harassment. These concerns resonated strongly with youth protesters too.



KEY FINDING 5:

Key strategies and enablers – such as increased access to information, accompaniment, mentorship and safe spaces – are needed for children and young people to be able to effectively participate and stay safe during protest.

Through this research, we were keen to gather not just information about children's experiences and feelings about protesting, but also their hopes and wishes for the future of protest. While Finding 1 – the need to be listened to and for their demands to be met – was children's greatest wish for the future, other key enabling and supportive factors were also mentioned, including access to information, accompaniment, mentorship, child-friendly spaces and practical support.

This research helps to further our understanding of the perspectives and opinions of children and young people involved in protests on their right to protest and their diverse experiences doing so. The findings – all of which resonate with other research and existing literature – reveal both the serious difficulties and barriers that child protesters face, as well as reasons to be hopeful for the future of protest and the change that children can help bring about. For each finding, the associated changes needed to create a better environment for child and youth protesters are clear. They are also linked to the obligations of states as articulated in the CRC, which has been ratified by all states except the USA, and other relevant international standards. The following recommendations spell out those key actions which children require adult decision-makers to take.



Manifesto for Change

This manifesto reflects what children and young people are calling for, based on the experiences and perspectives shared through this research. Spark Club members worked together with the project's research team to articulate these demands.

1. Listen to children and act on their demands



What children and young people want most from adult decision-makers is simple: to be listened to, taken seriously, and to see their ideas lead to real change.

They want:

- Their opinions, needs and demands not just heard, but respected and acted on.
- Clear and child-friendly ways to track what has been promised, so they can see what is happening and hold decision-makers accountable.
- Ongoing dialogue with adults and governments, based on respect and cooperation between generations.

2. Protect children participating in protests, making sure they have safe spaces to engage in protest



Children and young people want a future where they do not have to risk their safety to be heard.

This means:

- Ending all forms of violence, intimidation and reprisals against children exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, both online and offline.
- Child-sensitive policing that prioritizes communication and facilitation, and ensures that any use of force is lawful, necessary, proportionate and minimizes harm to children.
- Ensuring safe conditions for protest, both offline and online, including ensuring children are actively protected from any harm in the context of public assemblies, through nuanced and innovative approaches rather than unnecessary restriction of their rights.
- Ensuring that children and young people are protected from violence from the public, counter-protesters or other third parties when exercising their right to peaceful assembly.
- Establishing and/or strengthening frameworks governing the policing of protests involving children.

3. Remove obstacles to protest



Children emphasize that rules and regulations must support their right to protest – not block it.

They call for:

- Fewer complex procedures, such as difficult permit systems for in-person protests.
- The removal of unjustified age-based restrictions to organizing and participating in peaceful protests as well as restrictions placed on the time, place and content of assemblies.
- Children's safe participation in public assemblies to be facilitated to ensure children can join safely.

4. Ensure digital safety to allow children to protest effectively online



Children want safer online spaces. They stress the need for reduced surveillance, respect for personal data, and efforts to combat online harassment.

This includes:

- Limiting the amount of personal data collected from young users.
- Ensuring that platforms are transparent about how their algorithms work.
- Taking appropriate measures to prevent children being exposed to harmful content.
- Taking active measures to detect and remove online harassment and abuse.
- Providing accessible tools that allow children and young people to report harm and receive support.

5. Provide clear, age-appropriate guidance on how to protest peacefully, safely and meaningfully



Children are calling on governments and civil society to support access to clear, practical and age-appropriate guidance on how to take action safely.

6. Provide accompaniment and mentorship to child protesters



Children are calling on youth activists, communities and allies around the world to support them. They ask for guidance from teachers, parents and communities, support from experienced activists, and opportunities to learn from others to help them navigate different forms of protest safely and confidently.

7. Listen to, support and guide children who want to take action



Children understand that in-person and online protests are not always safe. They ask their parents and caregivers:

- To respect and listen to children's voices.
- To offer support and guidance for them to find meaningful ways for their voices to be heard, not only at in-person protests.

8. Challenge negative attitudes and narratives towards protest and people who protest



Children are calling on society and states to challenge negative attitudes towards protest and to stop all stigmatizing discourse and rhetoric which fuels harmful stereotypes about peaceful protest. Such rhetoric portrays peaceful protesters in a way that is likely to foster hostility and justify punitive measures against them, and this must stop. Children have a right to speak out. Children want protest to be seen as a legitimate and healthy part of society. At the same time, they urge action to address unequal power structures, such as adult-centrism, so they can fully develop their role as active participants and defenders of their rights and future.

Introduction

In recent years, children around the world have led and participated in major protests demanding climate justice, racial equality, social justice and better education, among other things. Children's vital involvement in activism and protest has revealed gaps in how states respect, protect and facilitate children's rights to protest. Children, like adults, have the right to voice their concerns, put forward demands, and be able and enabled to participate in society, including by being able to protest safely and without discrimination. What is more, children's right to freedom of peaceful assembly is important for their personal development, their participation in political and public affairs, and for catalysing local, national and global change.[7]

With an intersectional approach in mind, this report – as part of Amnesty International's Children's Right to Protest Project – sheds light on some of the barriers, challenges and human rights abuses experienced by children and youth when exercising their right to protest. It also showcases some of the strategies and approaches which enable them to successfully protest, and highlights their wishes and hopes for children exercising their right to protest in the future.



What is an intersectional approach?

An intersectional approach means recognizing that people's experiences are shaped by different parts of their identity and circumstances, such as age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, migration status or other grounds, which can combine to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.

7 UNICEF, *Free and Safe to Protest: Policing Assemblies Involving Children*, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/reports/free-and-safe-protest

Methodology

How have we heard from children and youth activists?

For the purposes of this research, we define children as under the age of 18 and youth participants / young people as people between the ages of 18 and 24.

We have used four methods to hear from child and youth activists: an online questionnaire, Spark Circles, interviews and the Spark Club. We also carried out desk research.

1

An online questionnaire allowed for voluntary, experiential accounts of children and young people who chose to respond. Among other topics, the questionnaire asked respondents about the focus of and motivation for their activism, what protest is like in their experience, how safe they feel protesting, what makes it hard for them to protest, and their hopes and wishes for children protesting in the future. There were no direct incentives for people to participate. The questionnaire was open between 13 September 2025 and 8 February 2026 and available in nine languages. We disseminated the questionnaire through Amnesty International's email distribution lists and online via LinkedIn. A total of 517 people responded and their self-reported ages were 13 to 24.



2

Spark Circles (focus group discussions) gave us a chance to hear more deeply from children and youth activists through voluntary, small group discussions. These sessions were designed to be safe spaces where participants could share what it feels like to take action, the challenges they face, the support they need, and their hopes for the future. They also helped children and youth activists connect with each other and with Amnesty International. In total, we held nine Spark Circles, all online, four of which were co-facilitated by members of the Spark Club. They included 19 children and 18 youth activists, plus one adult (who joined a discussion with youth aged over 18). Some participants in Spark Circles had existing connections with Amnesty International, and some did not.



3

Three interviews took place with a total of five children aged nine to 13 with experience of protesting (two interviews with two children and one with one child). The purpose of these interviews was to delve further into younger activists' specific experience. Interviews were carried out by two trained researchers following Amnesty International's internal guidelines on interviewing children, and in all three interviews, children were accompanied by a parent.



4

The Spark Club was formed by Amnesty International and brought together a group of 15 child and youth activists aged 11 to 17 (at the time of joining the Spark Club) from 12 different countries.[8] Recruited through Amnesty International's existing networks of children and young activists, the group met with Amnesty researchers roughly every month during the project (between September 2025 and July 2026) to help shape and guide the research process in multiple ways. They shared ideas for the questionnaire, created graphics that were used by Spark Club members and Amnesty national entities to spread the word about the research, co-facilitated Spark Circles, talked through the findings, and helped to create the final report. Members also participated in two Spark Circles.



5

Desk research also enabled us to understand and present the background and contextual information for this research. We also used desk research to understand and present the extent to which our findings resonate with other research or are supported by other evidence.



Who have we heard from?

At least 526 children and young people[9] and 49 parents and caregivers participated in the research. For the questionnaire, parents and caregivers either participated directly on behalf of their children (filling it in with them present), or filled it in about their children's experiences (without them being present). Three parents accompanied their children in interviews and did not actively participate.

[8] Spark Club members were from Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Palestine, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Africa and South Korea. Participation varied across meetings: while not all members attended every session, each meeting included between three and six participants. Some members were more active than others throughout the process.

[9] Please note that participants self-selected into the research and reported their own age; it was not possible to independently verify that all respondents met the age criteria for children and youth.

	Children (<18 years)	Young people (18-24 years)	Parents or caregivers	Total
Questionnaire	137	331	49	517
Spark Circles	19	19	0	38
Interviews	5	0	0	5
Spark Club	15	0	0	15
Totals	176	350	49	575

The questionnaire was anonymous and open to any child or young person who wanted to fill it in. As such, some of the people who participated in the other research methods may have also filled in the questionnaire and, given possible double counting of participants between methods, we cannot be entirely sure of the exact number of total research participants.

How did we make sure the research process was safe and ethical?

Amnesty International put in place thorough consent processes which allowed children and young people to decide if and how to participate at every stage of the research. Consent was received from all child and youth participants, as well as the parents or caregivers of all child participants before filling in the questionnaire or joining interviews or Spark Circles. Consent was treated as an ongoing process and was revisited at key stages throughout the interviews and Spark Circles. In case their participation brought up any difficult or traumatic memories, psychological support was made available for participants in the Spark Club, Spark Circles and interviews. Research participants' data was kept confidential and was used anonymously.

How have we analysed and written up what we have heard?

Amnesty International has emphasized and prioritized what the organization heard from children specifically. In the questionnaire and Spark Circles, we invited participation from people between the ages of 18 and 24 who had experience of protesting since before turning 18. However, we did not frame the questions for them to consider only their experiences before turning 18 and, as such, their responses are likely to reflect their experiences protesting as children and as young people. Given our explicit focus on children's right to protest, this report has aimed to foreground the data we received from those who self-reported that they were under 18 years of age at the time of their participation, with data received from youth participants used to support (or at times contrast) what we heard from children.

In writing the report, we relied heavily on direct quotations from research participants (questionnaire respondents, Spark Circle participants and interviewees). We have made some small edits to quotes to make them easier to understand, while being careful not to take away or change any of the meaning of what children and young people told us.

The findings are based on data gathered through all the research methods, which overall supported one another, with findings resonating across the methods. Where there are differences or things which were only mentioned through one research method, these are stated in the report.

It is important to note that the treatment and alleged violations which are related in some quotations have not been independently verified. Where possible, we have provided context to some of these experiences, drawing on existing research by Amnesty International. Nonetheless, individual cases have not been further investigated and are only reports coming from individual research participants.

Limitations and mitigation

The importance of including children as active participants in research and of centring their voices and experiences is increasingly recognized as a vital step towards influencing "decision-makers and influencers". However, identifying and reaching children, and accommodating them to take part in research, is acknowledged to be challenging due to, for example, adult gatekeeping, restrictive ethical frameworks that treat children as passive objects, structural power imbalances and adult-centric research methods.[10]

To centre children in the research design, we worked with the Spark Club throughout the entire research process, which:



Meant the research process was adult-initiated but with some shared decision-making, with children meaningfully influencing the process.



Provided opportunities for children to review and validate emerging findings and key messages, including through a validation meeting that helped refine the manifesto for change.



Enabled Spark Club members to co-facilitate four Spark Circles, together with Amnesty International researchers.[11]

[10] See, for example, Edmund Horowicz and Helen Stalford, *Introduction to The Ethics of Research Involving Children: Common Questions, Potential Strategies and Useful Guidance*, 2023, https://repository.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/ethics/

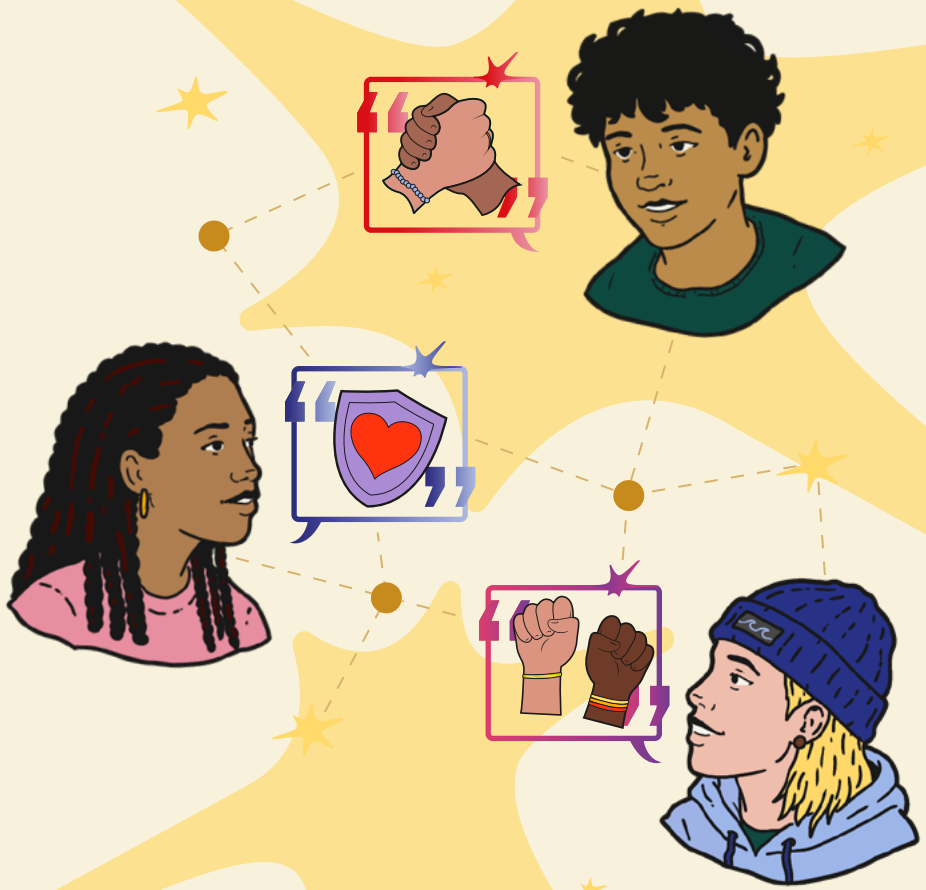
[11] The four Spark Circles which were co-facilitated by children from the Spark Club were: Spark Circle New Zealand (5 February 2026), Spark Circle South Korea (26 February 2026), Spark Circle Ireland (9 December 2025) and Spark Circle with CIVICUS (12 February 2026).

Nonetheless, some of the limitations remain, including having heard from more young people than children overall. This may reflect the challenge of accommodating children to participate in the research, with additional safeguarding considerations sometimes constraining Amnesty International entities and partners from engaging with children, thus limiting the child activist networks to which we had access.[12] We aimed to mitigate this challenge by using a range of research methods, which allowed us to prioritize the participation of children in the Spark Club, the Spark Circles (to some extent) and in interviews, boosting children's participation and perspectives in the research.

We acknowledge the limitations of geographic representation, with some countries or regions being more represented than others,[13] as well as possible constraints because children may not have been able to participate in the available languages.[14] We sought to address this by balancing out geographic participation across research methods, using the Spark Circles, the Spark Club and the interviews to include children from countries that were not represented in the questionnaire responses. We also translated the questionnaire into nine languages and provided language support for Spark Club meetings and Spark Circles (specifically Spanish, French and Arabic).

The data collected relied on participants truthfully reporting their experiences and their personal data (including their ages). Given the anonymous and self-selecting nature of the questionnaire, we have not been able to verify what they told us.

In the analysis, we sought to address limitations by foregrounding children's experiences in this report, with youth participants' perspectives brought in second to support (or contrast) children's experiences, and by using many more quotations and examples from children than young people. We also disaggregated data where possible to spot any differences between the responses from children and young people and highlight insights specific to children, as well as carrying out desk research so that the findings could be compared to existing evidence.



12 We had envisaged that Amnesty International national entities would facilitate Spark Circles with children. However, due to capacity constraints and a lack of engagement with children, only Amnesty International Argentina facilitated a session with young people. The rest of the Spark Circles were conducted by the core research team.

13 Due to different levels of dissemination and traction, children in some countries participated much more than others. While we heard from children across 71 countries through the online questionnaire, children and youth from seven countries provided 238 of the questionnaire responses (56%), with more than 15 responses from each of the seven countries.

14 Even though the questionnaire was available in nine languages, there were many languages the questionnaire was not translated into and the Spark Circles and Spark Club operated in English and Spanish only due to resource limitations.

Background

How are children's rights to protest protected internationally?

Children are among the groups of people identified by international and regional human rights treaties as requiring special attention and protection, including in the context of protests. Several human rights instruments recognize children's rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.[15]

Two key human rights treaties which do this are:

- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).



Article 21 of the ICCPR recognizes the right to freedom of peaceful assembly for every person without discrimination. The CRC's Article 15 echoes this principle, affirming that state parties must recognize the right of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

The CRC – one of very few international treaties with almost universal ratification – defines children as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".[16] For the purposes of this research, we define a child as a person under 18 years of age.

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15 UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General Comment No 37 (2020) on the Right of Peaceful Assembly (Article 21), 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 80; Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee), Comments on Human Rights Committee's Revised Draft General Comment No. 37 on Article 21 (Right of Peaceful Assembly) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 21 February 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CCPR/GCArticle21/EXPERTS_CRC.pdf p. 7.

16 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 1.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The most significant global treaty on children's rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the United Nations in 1989.

Children's rights are human rights that every child is entitled to. They protect children and support their survival, development and well-being - physically, mentally and emotionally. These rights apply everywhere, including at home, at school, outdoors and online.

The Convention is grounded in four guiding principles:

1. Non-discrimination (Article 2);
2. The best interests of the child (Article 3);
3. The right to life, survival, and development (Article 6); and
4. The right of the child to be heard (Article 12).

It recognizes children's entitlement to education, healthcare, protection from abuse, and participation in decisions affecting them, among other things.

The convention specifically recognizes and protects children's:

- Freedom of expression (Article 13);
- Freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15); and
- Right to be heard (Article 12).



Why these protections are important

This recognition and these protections are made all the more important because, in most jurisdictions, children do not enjoy full legal capacity like adults do and they lack political power or representation in traditional state structures.[17]

Due to this status, children's rights to engage in protest have become increasingly recognized and strengthened under international law. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the CRC Committee) has noted that children "may have an enhanced right to participate in peaceful assemblies because they are generally unable to vote, and therefore peaceful assembly is a means to bring about change."[18]

17 Anita Danka, *The Right of Children to be Heard through Peaceful Protests*, 2020, p. 408.

18 CRC Committee, Comments on Human Rights Committee's Revised Draft General Comment No. 37 (previously cited), p. 4

Challenges facing child protesters

Despite these protections, Amnesty International has documented numerous instances of children's right to protest being restricted, denied or violated. Many states have failed both to recognize and to afford children the additional protections to which they are entitled during protests. Children have been shamed, attacked, punished or threatened with punitive measures for standing up for their rights. They have been unlawfully arrested and detained, and have suffered violence and even been killed at the hands of security forces. Examples include, but are not limited to:

Live rounds fired at child protesters in Thailand[19]
Three children were injured by live rounds of ammunition fired during a demonstration outside a Thai police station in 2021 – allegedly fired by members of the public – during police officer's efforts to disperse peaceful demonstrators. Among the three were a 15-year-old boy who died later from his injuries. The perpetrator remains at large.

Child protesters arrested in Russia[20]
Photographic and video evidence from mass rallies (which were held in 2018 in more than 80 Russian cities and towns to protest pension reforms introduced by the government) shows children, including some barely in their teens, being arbitrarily arrested by police.

Children killed by security forces in protests in Iran[21]
An investigation by Amnesty International uncovered evidence that at least 23 children were killed by Iranian security forces in nationwide protests in November 2019.

Unnecessary and disproportionate use of force against children and young people in France[22]
During France's 2026 high-school protests, children and young people demanding their rights to education faced unnecessary and disproportionate use of force by police. Amnesty International raised concerns about the dangerous use of tear gas grenades, rubber bullets, and batons.

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19 Amnesty International, "Thailand: Urgent investigation needed after live rounds fired at child protesters", 18 August 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/08/thailand-urgent-investigation-needed-after-live-rounds-fired-at-child-protesters/
Amnesty International, "Thailand: Child protesters face 'severe repercussions' for taking part in mass demonstrations", 8 February 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/02/amnesty-thailand-child-protesters-report/

20 Amnesty International, "Russia: Police crush peaceful protests and arrest hundreds including children", 10 September 2018, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2018/09/russia-police-crush-peaceful-protests-and-arrest-hundreds-including-children/

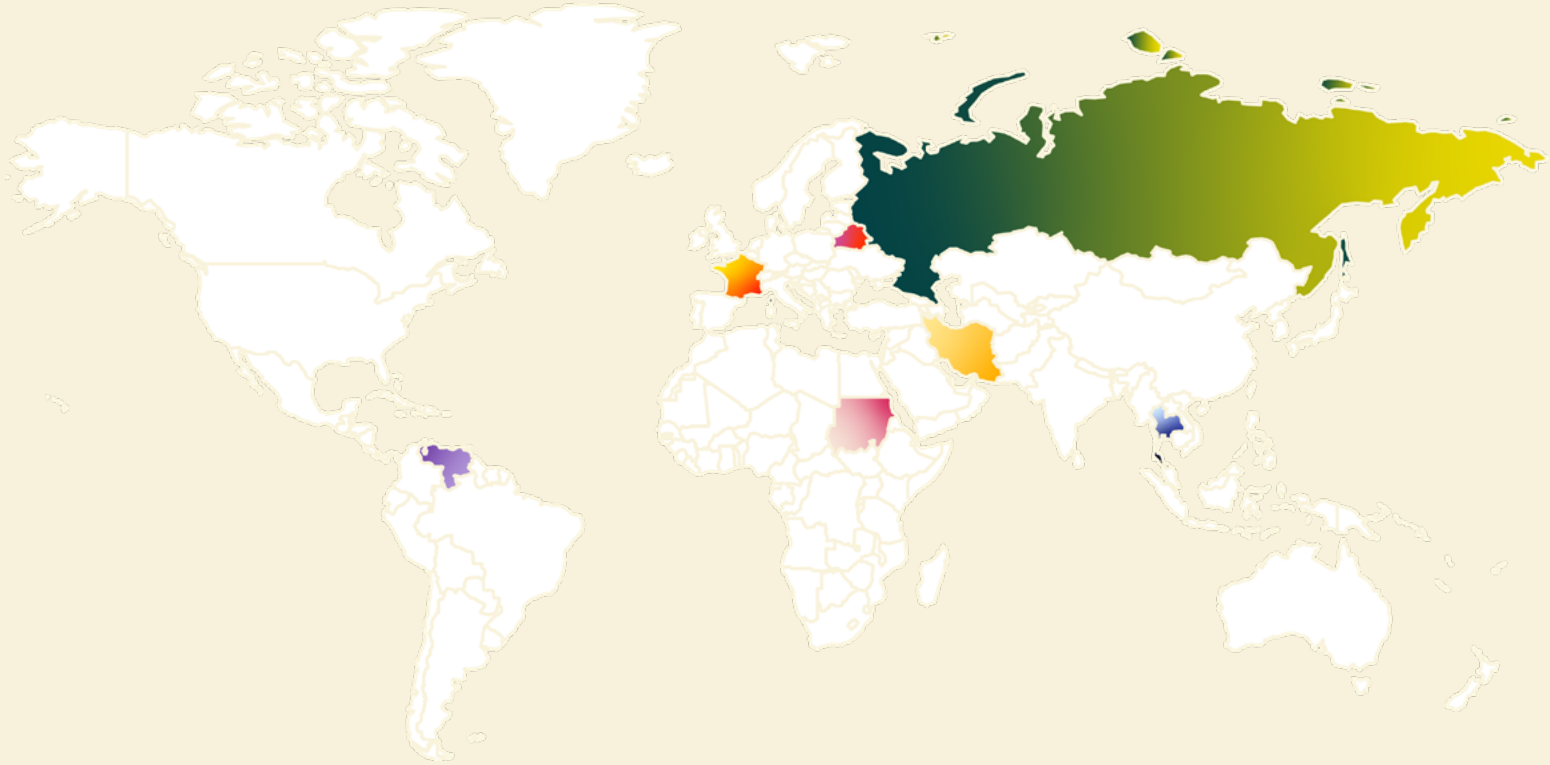
21 Amesty International, *Iran: 'They Shot Our Children': Killings of Minors in Iran's November 2019 Protests* (Index: MDE 13/1894/2020), 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/1894/2020/en/

22 Amnesty International, "France: Authorities must de-escalate tensions during student protests", 5 October 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/10/france-authorities-must-de-escalate-tensions-during-student-protests/

A crackdown on child protesters in Belarus[23]
Amnesty International found that children were victims of human rights violations in the context of demonstrations in Belarus following the widely-disputed presidential election on 9 August 2020. They were deprived of their right to peaceful assembly and subjected to unlawful use of police force on arrest and in detention.

Child protesters killed in Sudan[24]
On 29 July 2019, security officers reportedly opened fire during student protests killing six people, including four students under 18 years of age.

Torture, arbitrary arrest and abuse of children in Venezuela[25]
Amnesty International's investigations exposed the arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and gross violations of the right to a fair trial of six children in Venezuela between 29 and 31 July 2024. The violations took place during the post-electoral crackdown on dissent by former president Nicolas Maduro's government. As of November 2024, at least 198 children remained subjected to either arbitrary detention, trumped up criminal charges, or the serious mental and physical consequences of abuse perpetrated by the Venezuelan authorities.



***Highlighted countries represent some of the cases of human rights abuses against children that Amnesty International has previously documented. Human rights concerns related to children and protest are not limited to these contexts and occur in many other countries around the world.**

23 Amnesty International, "Belarus: Release minor pending appeal of five-year prison sentence", 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/04/belarus-release-minor-pending-appeal-of-fiveyear-prison-sentence/
Amnesty International, *Children in Belarus: Hostages to the Regime*, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/belarus-crackdown-on-children_web.pdf

24 Amnesty International, "Sudan: Close down trigger-happy paramilitary force not schools", 2019, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/07/sudan-close-down-trigger-happy-paramilitary-force-not-schools-2

25 Amnesty International, "Venezuela: Torture, arbitrary detention and abuse of dozens of children must stir international justice into action", 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/venezuela-tortura-abusos-contra-ninos-ninas/

Child and youth identities

It is important to note that legal, social and cultural definitions and understandings of children and childhood vary enormously across countries and contexts. As mentioned, for the purposes of this research, we define children as under the age of 18, in line with the CRC, and youth participants / young people as people between the ages of 18 and 24. Yet we also recognize that these definitions do not always align with children and young people's lived realities, or how children and young people see themselves. Some adolescents may not identify as children, and may see themselves as activists, young people or leaders in their own right. What is more, age categories are not static and the transitional period between 'childhood' and 'adulthood' is complex and varies according to the experiences of each individual, as well as their cultural, social and economic backgrounds. While in no way wanting to treat them in ways which deny their maturity, agency, autonomy and capability, we consider it important use the terms "child" and "children" because of the special status that the terms have legally and with regards to their specific rights.

We use the term *child and youth activists* to refer to children and young people who have participated in any type of activism or protest, even if they themselves do not specifically or explicitly call themselves "activists".

It is also important to acknowledge that children and young people are not a homogenous group, and their experiences and perspectives differ greatly depending on their age, contexts and intersecting identities. Recognizing that their experiences are shaped by many intersecting factors, this research brings together their diverse experiences to highlight shared issues, different challenges and collective wishes for the future of protesting for children and youth.



Children's motivations and activism focus

Children told Amnesty International they want decision-makers to listen and respond to their demands. Many children who protest are motivated by the desire to have a positive impact on other people's lives and their environments, on principle because they believe it is the right thing to do, to increase public awareness and/or to call for positive change because their rights are violated. Many children who protest do so about a wide range of issues. Many children and youth activists who took part in this research reported they carry out protest both in online and offline spaces, although experiences of online protest are slightly more common.[26]

In the Spark Circles, children and young people were invited to share their activism journeys, including how and why they first became involved. Many spoke about attending protests with a parent or friend, while some described being motivated by injustices they had witnessed or experienced personally or which they have seen affect others.



[26] Among questionnaire respondents, 351 (76%) reported having participated in online protest, while 288 (62%) reported having participated in offline protest.

Several participants highlighted how their own lived experiences shaped their activism. For example, one participant from Uganda described growing up as the only girl among seven brothers and losing her mother at a young age, explaining how these experiences influenced her advocacy for women's rights. A male participant from South Korea shared that their first experience of protest took place online and focused on gamers' rights.[27] Others spoke more broadly about a sense of responsibility and personal agency, emphasizing that protecting human rights is not only the role of governments or experts but something ordinary people can contribute to. As one 17-year-old female participant from South Korea explained, "I think it was kind of a sense of duty that I have to participate, to change the world and to have a place in this society".[28] A 17-year-old male from Ireland reflected a similar motivation, saying, "I want to make even just the smallest change".[29]

For some, this sense of responsibility was also linked to witnessing harm within their own communities, for example one 17-year-old male participant from the Philippines described how: "My community is suffering all the damages from this greedy system of business. And so, I decided to step up, and am now using my voice."[30]

The most cited reason for protesting, as reported in the questionnaire, was "to call for positive change in other peoples' lives", as expressed by 353 (77%) of the questionnaire respondents (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Graph showing questionnaire respondents' reasons for protesting (respondents were free to choose from more than one option so the numbers represent the number of participants who selected each option)



27 While not a formal, legal concept, "gamers' rights" refers to a collection of consumer, privacy, accessibility, and digital ownership issues affecting people who play video games.

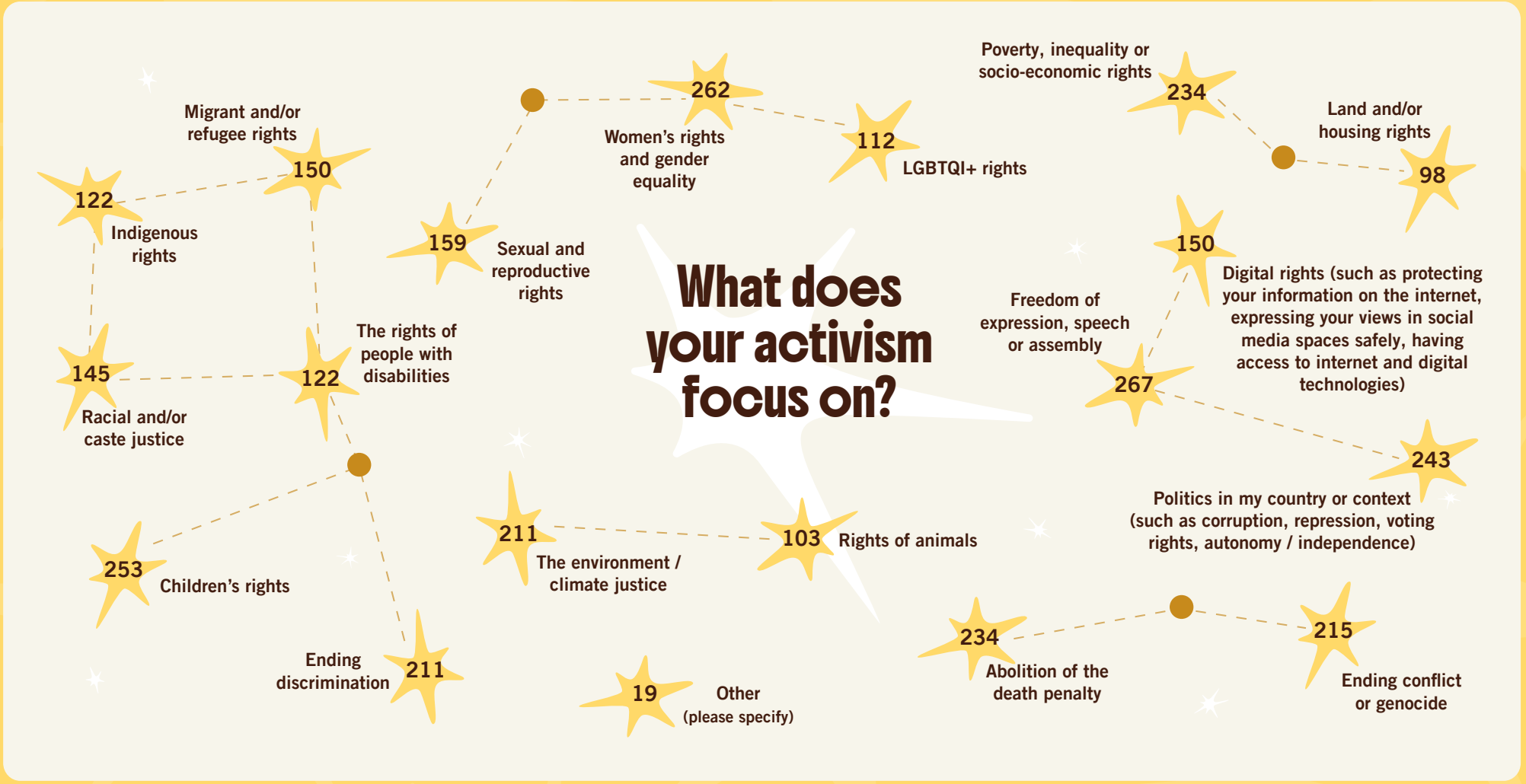
28 17-year-old female, South Korea (female participant 1), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.

29 17-year-old male, Ireland, Spark Circle, 9 December 2025.

30 17-year-old male, the Philippines, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.

The graph below shows the questionnaire responses relating to the issues about which children and young people protest. This was a multiple choice question, and the vast majority of respondents – 421 of 468 (90%) – selected more than one issue in response to the question "What does your activism focus on?"

Figure 2: Graph showing questionnaire respondents' reasons for protesting (respondents were free to choose from more than one option so the numbers represent the number of participants who selected each option)



Children's hopes and wishes for protest

KEY FINDING 1:

Children are hopeful that their protest can drive change despite feeling they are taken less seriously.

Through the research we found that, overall, children feel hopeful about their ability to affect change through protest and feel empowered by their protest experiences. This also resonated with the young people who participated in the research. We also found that, when reflecting on their hopes and wishes for the future of protest, children greatly stressed their desire and need to be listened to, to have their demands met, and to see action from duty-bearers in response to their protest efforts and their activism. While this was something that youth activist participants also expressed, it was overwhelming among child research participants, some of whom also mentioned specifically that they are taken less seriously because they are children, and that they feel this situation must change.



What is a duty-bearer?

A duty-bearer is an actor with legal obligations under international human rights law to respect, protect and fulfil people's human rights. States are primary duty bearers, acting through government institutions and public officials, including local authorities, schools and police.

Children's hopefulness regarding protest

In the questionnaire we asked children and young people to describe what protest is like in their experience. It was a multiple-choice question, with an "other" option inviting alternative answers. The words to choose from were a mix of positive adjectives – such as fun, empowering and exciting – and more negative ones – such as scary, stressful and ignored (see Figure 5 below).

The three most selected adjectives that describe participants' experience of protest were:

hopeful, empowering and impactful.[31]



Figure 5: Graph showing frequency of adjectives selected to describe respondents' experience of protesting (respondents were free to choose from more than one option. The number represents the number of participants who selected each option).

[31] 276 selected "hopeful", 260 "empowering" and 249 "impactful".

We also gave questionnaire respondents the option to expand on their answers and explain more about how they feel when they protest. This was done by 170 participants, and many described the hope they feel. One 17-year-old male participant from Argentina, who identifies as LGBTQIA+ and a member of an ethnic minority, felt "empowered and hopeful".[32] A 15-year-old female participant from China, who identifies as a "Third Culture Kid",[33] felt "both inspired by the possibility of change and angered by the injustices".[34]

In the Spark Circles, children described similar sentiments: some said protesting made them feel hopeful and comfortable, while others spoke about how it gave them a way to show what they care about, to directly express their views and what they want to change, and to come together with others to create change. A 17-year-old male from South Korea described how "I joined the protest, and I was really impressed, because I got a chance to show what I think about the policies in a direct way, in a way that can actually help other people."[36]

These feelings also resonated strongly with youth activists, who expanded on the hope and empowerment they feel, describing protest as "the light at the end of the cave when all solutions have run out"[37] and "the only hope for unifying the demands of the people".[38] This hope is often described as what propels children and youth protesters: "even when the environment feels unsafe, the belief that our actions can bring positive change keeps me going".[39]

> "Protesting, for me, is also a deeply hopeful experience. It is a space where people come together with the belief that change is possible, and that collective action can influence leaders and institutions."
>
> — 23-year-old female from Nigeria who describes herself as a member of an ethnic minority.[40]

> "I love protesting, it's so empowering and I spend lots of time helping others, through educating them, or supporting them and keeping them safe when attending protests".
>
> — 15-year-old female participant from New Zealand who identifies as LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergent.[35]

What is collective action?

Action taken by two or more people working together to create change around an issue they care about. Collective action includes, but is not limited to, protest. Examples include community clean-ups, crowdfunding, consumer boycotts and trade union strikes.

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32 Questionnaire response 7 (Spanish), 7 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "me siento empoderado, esperanzado".

33 A "third-culture kid" is somebody raised in a culture outside their parents' home culture for a significant part of their childhood. Coined by sociologist Ruth Hill Useem, the "third culture" is a blend of the parents' home culture and the local host cultures, creating a unique identity.

34 Questionnaire response 212 (English), 20 November 2025.

35 Questionnaire response 11 (English), 13 November 2025.

36 17-year-old male from South Korea (male participant 2), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.

37 Questionnaire response 129 (Arabic), 19 November 2025 (21-year-old female respondent from Egypt).

38 Questionnaire response 74 (Arabic), 19 November 2025 (24-year-old male respondent from Chad). Originally in Arabic: وه الألم الوحيد لتوحيد مطالب الشعب

39 Questionnaire response 210 (English), 20 November 2025 (23-year-old male respondent from Nigeria).

40 Questionnaire response 185 (English), 20 November 2025.

Children's right to be heard

> "I think what makes people not listen to us is that they think that you are children, and whatever we say does not matter. My background doesn't actually affect how I protest, but my age, because I'm at a very young age of 13, and most people say that 13 is a very young age for a child to be protesting. Most people say that if you're a teen, you're not supposed to be anywhere, in social media, or doing anything that involves protesting".
>
> — 13-year-old female participant from Kenya.[41]



The need to be heard and taken seriously was a sentiment which came through strongly. When asked about their hopes and wishes for the future, children expressed a desire that "we children can also demand justice or have our needs met",[42] that children are "genuinely heard",[43] and that "young people's words and demands are taken seriously".[44] A 15-year-old from Spain simply asked that "someone takes notice of us".[45] One 16-year-old from Indonesia described their hope that "young people grow up knowing that speaking out is not an act of rebellion, but an act of responsibility, and that the world meets their bravery with **listening ears and open hearts**".[46]

Research participants described feeling that adults do not take children's voices seriously, and do not see them as being "ready yet" to take action, with one 16-year-old female from New Zealand saying, "we're just kids, they're not going to listen to us".[47] Children spoke about their disagreement with adults on this matter, and feeling strongly that children do deserve the space to voice their concerns and opinions. One 16-year-old from Pakistan described how in "my country, people, even my parents think 'he is too young to understand this shit'... I am literally 16. And I am mature enough to understand a context."[48]

Some participants also spoke about feeling hopeless and frustrated by restrictions on protest and having their voice heard. For example, a 16-year-old female participant from New Zealand described how "it makes me feel powerless. Especially as a young person, it feels like just the power is being stripped away from people, and especially with the combination of... things like restrictions on protests".[49]

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41 13-year-old female, Kenya, interview, 24 April 2026.

42 Questionnaire response 8 (Spanish), 9 November 2025 (13-year-old respondent from Chile). Originally in Spanish: "Que los niños también podemos exigir justicia o que se haga valer nuestras necesidades".

43 Questionnaire response 290 (English), 24 November 2025 (16-year-old male respondent from Bangladesh who describes himself as from a low-income household).

44 Questionnaire response 235 (French), 20 November 2025 (16-year-old female respondent from France who is from a rural or remote area and from a low-income household). Originally in French: "Qu'on prenne au sérieux là paroles et les revendications des jeunes".

45 Questionnaire response 334 (Spanish), 3 December 2025. Originally in Spanish: "que se nos haga caso".

46 Questionnaire response 485 (English), 28 January 2026.

47 16-year-old female from New Zealand, Spark Circle, 5 February 2026.

48 Questionnaire response 290 (English), 24 November 2025.

49 16-year-old female from New Zealand, Spark Circle 5th February 2026

> "I believe that once children have a clear understanding of the meaning of expressing and participating in protests, adults should respect their opinions, listen to their perspectives, and incorporate their views into all decision-making processes."
>
> — 17-year-old male Spark Circle participant from the Philippines.[50]

Another shifted the emphasis and responsibility onto decision-makers:

> "I feel that, instead of placing the burden on future children to protest – even though I definitely hope that more young people take part in activism – the responsibility should fall on governments, institutions and local communities to actually listen to us."
>
> — 15-year-old female activist from China.[51]

Other participants went further, stating their wish that they did not have to resort to protest, and that their perspectives were taken into account and their needs met in other ways.

These needs and wishes also resonate with young people who participated in the research. A 24-year-old male participant from Colombia, who identifies as LGBTQIA+, neurodivergent and from a low-income household, described a "profound desire for activism in the future to be transformed, ensuring that children and youth can make their voices heard in safe, demilitarized environments, free from the trauma and violence that we ourselves had to face."[52]

> "In future, I don't even want us to have to 'protest' or 'demonstrate' just to be heard. But if that's still the case, let's support these children, rather than using violence against them or arresting them."
>
> — 23-year-old female from Cameroon.[53]



50 17-year-old male from the Philippines, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.

51 Questionnaire response 212 (English), 20 November 2025.

52 Questionnaire response 119 (Spanish), 19 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "mi profundo deseo de que el activismo del futuro se transforme, garantizando que los niños y jóvenes puedan alzar su voz en entornos desmilitarizados y seguros, libres del trauma y la violencia que a nosotros nos tocó enfrentar".

53 Questionnaire response 305 (French), 27 November 2025. Originally in French: "À l'avenir, je ne souhaite même plus que l'on soit dans l'obligation de 'protester' ou de 'manifester' pour en fin être entendu. Mais si ça doit toujours être le cas, que l'on encadre ces enfants, au lieu de les violenter, ou de les arrêter".

One 24-year-old female participant from France, who identifies as being from a low-income household, said she wants the voices of protesters to "be so strong that those who wish to ignore them simply cannot".[54] A 19-year-old Pakistani participant said he wishes that "adults, decision-makers, and communities take children's insights seriously",[55] while a 23-year-old male Yemeni respondent who identifies as Indigenous expressed his desire for "a rapid response to the demands for which citizens are protesting".[56]

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

International human rights law recognizes children as rights holders who are capable of forming and expressing their own views and participating in decision-making in accordance with their evolving capacities.

- CRC Article 12 establishes that children capable of forming their own views have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, and that their views should be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
- CRC Article 5 recognizes the concept of evolving capacities, requiring parents and others responsible for the child to provide appropriate guidance consistent with the child's evolving capacities.[57]

What are evolving capacities?

As children grow and develop, they gain increasing abilities to understand, make decisions, express views and exercise their rights. Adults should provide guidance that reflects this development.



Administrative obstacles to protest

Children and young people raised complaints about procedural or official barriers such as complicated permit procedures or restrictions on where to protest. They called for these restrictions and barriers to be removed. Participants in Spark Circles described difficulties in communicating with local authorities, in understanding whether or not permits are required, as well as understanding how to get permits.

54 Questionnaire response 90 (French), 19 November 2025. Originally in French: "cette voix doit etre tellement forte que même ceux qui voudraient l' ignorer ne pourraient".

55 Questionnaire response 258 (English), 21 November 2025.

56 Questionnaire response 74 (Arabic), 19 November 2025. Originally in Arabic : الاستجابة السريعة للمطالب التي يخرج لأجلها المواطنين..

57 CRC Committee, General Comment 12: The right of the child to be heard, 20 July 2009, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/12.

> "There's a bill going through, meaning that you can't protest outside of residential areas, so that is a massive problem... So, that completely goes against what a protest is, because the idea is that a protest disrupts things, but you're asking, like, the police and the states for permission?"
>
> — 16-year-old from New Zealand.[58]

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

International and regional human rights standards governing the right of peaceful assembly emphasize, as a core principle, the "presumption in favour of peacefulness of assemblies",[59] which should be reflected in domestic legislation, policy and practice. This obliges states to respect, protect and facilitate peaceful assemblies and, among other things, remove obstacles to participants and organizers, fully justify any restrictions, and exercise tolerance and restraint (including in relation to disruption). Indeed, states have both negative obligations (to avoid unwarranted interferences with the exercise of the right of peaceful assembly), and positive obligations (to both protect those exercising the right and to facilitate the exercise of the right in ways that make it possible for participants to freely and safely assemble and achieve their objectives). Any limitations placed on the right of peaceful assembly must in turn adhere to the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality.

In order to establish an enabling environment for children's full enjoyment of the right of peaceful assembly, states should:

- Remove unjustified age-based restrictions to organizing and participating in peaceful protests.
- Facilitate safe participation in public assemblies to ensure children can join safely.
- Establish and/or strengthen frameworks governing the policing of protests involving children.
- Ensure that law enforcement refrains from unnecessary and excessive use of force.
- Provide or facilitate education for children and adults about these rights.

Amnesty International's recent research has revealed the multiple ways in which this is not the case. For example, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Türkiye prescribe minimum age requirements for *organizing* protests and, in recent years, international expert monitoring bodies have called on Hungary, Türkiye and the United Kingdom (UK) to amend legislation to ensure that children do not face repression, including through criminalization, in relation to the exercise of their right of freedom of peaceful assembly, including through their involvement in activism.[60]

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58 16-year-old from New Zealand, Spark Circle, 5 February 2026.

59 UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 37: The right of peaceful assembly, 17 September 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, para 17.

60 Amnesty International, *Under Protected and Over Restricted* (previously cited).

Analysis

The findings from this research resonate with the existing understanding of children's participation in protest. For example, research with youth climate protesters in the Fridays for Future movement in London, UK, found that repeated participation in protests fostered optimism and future-oriented thinking.[61] Interviewees in that study described activism as making them feel that "change is coming" and that collective action could shape the future. Similarly, a longitudinal study on civically engaged youth in Hong Kong between 1981 and 2001 showed that participation in social movements increased young people's belief that they could influence institutions and policies through collective action.[62] Studies of school-based youth social action have found children explicitly linking activism to hope.[63]

What is more, these findings contribute to an extensive body of evidence which shows that children who protest consistently emphasize two interlinked demands: 1. that adults and institutions should listen to them, and 2. that concrete action must follow, not symbolic or tokenistic acknowledgment alone. Studies show children often demand participation in decision-making rather than merely being consulted. For example, one study which reviews the progress and challenges for children and young people's participation in activism describes how young people increasingly reject tokenistic consultation, viewing themselves as legitimate political actors who demand direct power and influence in institutional decision-making.[64] In his study of Gen Z activism, Tobias Hess concludes how "being seen as a beacon of hope is quite different from being truly listened to".[65] The findings also resonate with Amnesty International's previous research, such as a study on children's rights to peaceful assembly in Thailand, which revealed similar sentiments. For example, a 17-year-old protester from Bangkok said "I just want them to stop dismissing us just because we are children. Children's voices matter. We can't trust the government unless they start to listen to us".[66] Amnesty International's research on the right to protest in 21 European countries similarly revealed ways in which states are limiting children's right to be heard.[67]

The findings from this research reinforce the call of children's diverse protest movements around the world for governments and institutions to respond meaningfully to their concerns and demands. Under the CRC, states have a legal obligation to guarantee children's rights to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 15), and related rights such as the right to freedom of expression (Article 13) and the right to be heard and participate in matters affecting their lives (Article 12).

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61 Jasper Cattell, "'Change is coming': Imagined futures, optimism and pessimism among youth climate protesters", 2021, Canadian Journal of Family and Youth / Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse, Volume 13, Issue 1, https://doi.org/10.29173/cjfy29598

62 Randolph C. H. Chan and others, "Effects of social movement participation on political efficacy and well-being: A longitudinal study of civically engaged youth", 2021, Journal of Happiness Studies, Volume 22, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00303-y

63 Deborah J. Crook and others, "Youth-led social action at school: 'It made me think that there could be a way to make things better in the future'", August 2024, Childhood, Volume 31, Issue 3, https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682241269791

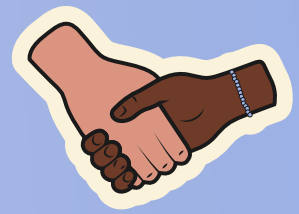
64 E. Kay M. Tisdall and Patricio Cuevas-Parra, "Beyond the familiar challenges for children and young people's participation rights: The potential of activism", September 2021, The International Journal of Human Rights, Volume 26, Issue 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2021.1968377

65 Tobias Hess, "'Gen Z will save us': Applauded and dismissed as a Gen Z climate activist", 2021, Journal of Applied Research on Children, Volume 12, Issue 1, https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol12/iss1/5

66 Amnesty International, *"We Are Reclaiming Our Future": Children's Right to Peaceful Assembly in Thailand* (Index: ASA 39/6336/2023), 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/6336/2023/en/

67 Amnesty International, *Under Protected and Over Restricted* (previously cited).

Support and deterrence for children's right to protest





KEY FINDING 2:

Supportive relationships strengthen children's confidence and willingness to protest, while negative attitudes can deter participation.

Children and young people alike stressed the importance of having people in their lives who support them and their activism. Through the questionnaire, we discovered that a range of people provide support to child and youth activists. In the Spark Circles and interviews, many children specifically described how their parents have been instigators and/or facilitators of their activism. While the importance of parental support resonated with young people, it was somewhat less important than among children. Children also stressed that negative perceptions, attitudes and narratives about protest can dissuade them from protesting (something which also resonated with young people).

> "I think it's having most friends, and also organizations. Friends give me motivation, and organizations give me the space to protest what I want to protest".
>
> — 13-year-old female participant from Kenya.[68]

[68] 13-year-old female participant from Kenya, interview, 24 April 2026.

Sources of support

In the questionnaire we asked respondents to identify how supportive different people are of their activism using a scale between "very supportive" and "very unsupportive".

The following groups were broadly described as more supportive than unsupportive:



Respondents described members of the public as mixed in their support (roughly half describing them as supportive and the other half unsupportive).

Police and government officials were identified as being more unsupportive than supportive by the majority of respondents.

Disaggregation of the data showed some small differences in how children and youth activists experience support from different groups. For example, slightly more children than young people described their parents as supportive or very supportive; while slightly more young people than children described their teachers as supportive or very supportive. For other groups, there was no difference between children and youth respondents.

> "Anytime I speak, I get a lot of support from my family or my friends. So that gives me a push to work more… to keep going, I suppose."
>
> — 13-year-old female participant from Palestine.[69]

[69] 13-year-old female from Palestine, interview, 17 April 2026.

Parental support

> "I was lucky, because my parents were very supportive... so they already see social action as something meaningful and necessary. So, because of that, the barrier for me feels much lower, and I feel rather encouraged than restricted when I get involved into things like protesting"
>
> — 17-year-old female participant from South Korea.[70]

Many children described how their parents took them to protests and how their activism grew from there. This was the case for a 14-year-old from South Africa, whose experience of protest started with his mother taking him to an LGBTQIA+ event at the age of seven,[71] and also for a 15-year-old Irish participant, whose mother had also taken him to protests.[72] Interviewees had similar experiences – Belgian brothers aged nine and 12 first started attending events for squatters' rights (the rights of people occupying property that is often unused or abandoned) with their mother when they were very young; and Kenyan sisters aged 10 and 13 joined their mother at protests too.

When children were asked about their hopes for protest in the future, several explicitly mentioned the importance of parental support, calling for parents to be "reliable for children that are taking action",[73] and for "support from parents and teachers as we are fighting for our future and others".[74] One stated: "I would change parents' and teachers' perspective on protest".[75]

Parental concerns

Participants also shared that a lack of parental support can be a barrier to them protesting, with parents' fears or worries inhibiting children joining protests. For example, a 17-year-old male participant from Ireland described how "it took so long… to convince my parents… when I went to my first protest".[76] When asked about their main barriers to protest in the questionnaire, 33 out of 137 children (24%) selected a lack of support from their parents, while 46 (34%) identified parents or teachers not allowing them to protest as a major barrier.

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70 17-year-old female from South Korea (female participant 2), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.

71 14-year-old male from South Africa, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.

72 15-year-old male from Ireland, Spark Circle, 9 December.

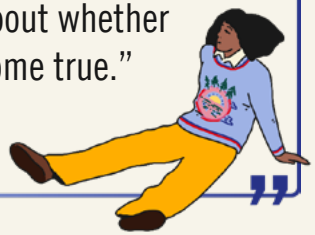
73 Questionnaire response 3 (English), 3 November 2025.

74 Questionnaire response 80 (English), 19 November 2025.

75 Questionnaire response 94 (English), 19 November 2025.

76 17-year-old male from Ireland, Spark Circle, 9 December 2025.

> “I think [parents are] really worrying about our safety during the protest, and they’re worrying about our future, about whether we’ll be able to get jobs and make our dreams come true.”
>
> — 17-year-old female participant from South Korea.[77]



Some youth activists also expressed similar sentiments (although parents’ concerns and roles were less widely cited among young people than children). One 18-year-old male from the United States of America (USA) described not having participated in many protests “in large part due to my parents and their fears for my safety. Being the child of immigrants, I’ve grown up acutely aware of my precarious position.”[78]

The questionnaire enabled parents and guardians themselves to report what they felt the challenges are for their children protesting. Forty-nine parents or guardians filled in the questionnaire. Their responses included “fear of violence… intimidation”,[79] “safety issues”,[80] “their safety and protection during and after the protests”,[81] “government violence”[82] and “fear of being ostracized”.[83] The fears and concerns of parents are likely to be a result of the possibility of children facing unjustified consequences in many contexts if they protest, such as violence, criminalization and surveillance (issues explored in the section below on safety and security).

Solidarity and unity

Feeling a sense of solidarity, community and unity with others is an important motivational factor for children. When questionnaire respondents expanded on how they feel when they protest, this was a sentiment which came through strongly. A 16-year-old from Mongolia said: **“I love how people stand all together peacefully against the problem with unity”**.[84] A 17-year-old Argentinian who identifies as LGBTQIA+, being from a low-income household and as neurodivergent described how **“I feel absolutely brilliant; the excitement gives me goosebumps. I feel supported because I know that the people around me feel the same way I do.”**[85] Several children described feeling connected to something greater than themselves, feeling less alone, and feeling strength from connecting and being with other protesters. Participants spoke about the importance of community in protest, describing it as both a key motivation for protesting and a way of not

77 17-year-old female from South Korea (female participant 1), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.
78 Questionnaire response 381 (English), 13 December 2025.
79 Questionnaire response 78 (English), 18 November 2025.
80 Questionnaire response 95 (English), 19 November 2025.
81 Questionnaire response 196 (English), 20 November 2025.
82 Questionnaire response 160 (English), 19 November 2025.
83 Questionnaire response 182 (English), 13 December 2025.
84 Questionnaire response 487 (English), 28 January 2026.
85 Questionnaire response 410 (Spanish), 7 January 2026. Originally in Spanish: “Me siento super bien, la emoción me pone la piel de gallina. me siento acompañado porque se que a mi al rededor las personas piensan lo mismo que yo.”

feeling alone. One 14-year-old participant from South Africa explained: **"When you're facing that threat alone, things seem so big. But when everyone comes together, you realize that a problem can't be solved by just one person. You need a collective."**[86]

> "I just love the community. Like, that's really important, especially nowadays, is just, getting in touch with our communities and supporting other communities."
>
> — 16-year-old female participant from New Zealand.[87]

These feelings of unity and commonality also resonated with youth protesters. One 23-year-old from Nigeria described how **"there is also a strong sense of belonging when you stand with people who share the same struggle"**,[88] while for a 19-year-old from Pakistan: **"There is a shared energy among people who have come together for a common purpose. It creates a sense of unity, hope, and moral duty."**[89]

> "There is a certain energy in the air when you stand beside others who believe in the same cause. Even if the protest is peaceful, there is a seriousness that reminds you that you are fighting for something bigger than yourself... You feel seen. You feel like your voice, which is often ignored, suddenly has strength when it joins with others... In my experience, what truly stays with you after a protest is not only the chants and the signs, but the sense of unity."
>
> — 22-year-old female from Nigeria who identifies as being from a low-income household.[90]



Negative perceptions, attitudes and stigma

Negative perceptions and attitudes present a barrier to children's ability and confidence to protest. When expanding on barriers to children's participation in protests, participants described a mix of media portrayals, cultural attitudes and adult-centric dynamics which shape how young people who protest are seen and make it difficult for them to protest. This can discourage children from taking action and leave them feeling misrepresented or not listened to.

86 14-year-old male from South Africa, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.
87 16-year-old female from New Zealand, Spark Circle, 5 February 2026.
88 Questionnaire response 210 (English), 20 November 2025.
89 Questionnaire response 112 (English), 19 November 2025
90 Questionnaire response 43 (English), 19 November 2025.

Some participants highlighted how national cultures can sometimes shape how protest, and young people's involvement in protest, is seen. Similarly, a country's history can affect how protest and protesters are viewed. A 16-year-old participant from New Zealand spoke about there being "a culture of just being chill and not really caring",[91] while other Spark Circle participants from South Korea reflected on how the country's historical context of violent state repression continues to shape societal perceptions (despite the fact that protesting today is largely safe), with some people still viewing protest as dangerous or as having a negative effect on children's future or career prospects.

> "Many people [in South Korea]... usually do not like their child actively protesting or participating, because in the 80s... during the military dictatorship, people who protested faced severe social discrimination, which affected their economic and social status."
>
> — 17-year-old male from South Korea.[92]

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

Article 3(1) of the CRC provides that, in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private institutions the "best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." This obligation is relevant to decisions, laws and policies concerning children's participation in peaceful assemblies and protests.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has clarified that the best interests principle must be interpreted consistently with all the rights guaranteed under the CRC and it must take in consideration the child's view, in accordance with Article 12 of the CRC and should not be used to impose unjustified restrictions on a child's rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and participation.

Article 3(1) places three main obligations on states:

1. To ensure the child's best interests are appropriately integrated and consistently applied in every action taken by a public institution concerning children;
2. To ensure that all judicial and administration decisions as well as policies and legislation concerning children demonstrate that the child's best interests have been a primary consideration; and
3. To ensure that the best interests of the child have been assessed and taken as a primary consideration in decisions and actions taken by the private sector and affecting children.

Public institutions must also ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child is not misused to justify practices "which conflict with the child's human dignity or with the rights guaranteed under the CRC."[93]

Measures taken in the name of the child's best interests must be lawful, evidence-based, necessary and proportionate, and interpreted consistently with the child's right to be heard (Article 12), freedom of expression (Article 13) and freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 15).

91 16-year-old female participant from New Zealand, Spark Circle, 5 February 2026.

92 17-year-old male from South Korea (male participant 1), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.

93 CRC Committee, General Comment 13: Right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, 18 April 2011, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/13, para. 61.

Analysis

These findings highlight how children's participation in protest is shaped and affected not only by their direct relationships with people in their lives, but also by wider social attitudes to protest. This resonates with existing research on children and young people's participation in protest and activism.

Research consistently shows that supportive adults and organizations can play an important role in child and youth activism. For example, one study on young people's attitudes toward adult involvement within "youth led" climate groups revealed how children often do need the support of adults, which they viewed as valuable for increasing the movement's capacity.[94] Another study demonstrated how adults can play four key roles – as collaborators, guides, facilitators and advocates – in different spaces and contexts, and how, by taking on these various roles, they can contribute to young people's empowered participation.[95] A further study explored the contrasting tensions of adults being in "solidarity" with young people while not reproducing systems of oppression through adultism. The findings offer four types of actions adults can do (modelling, connecting, supporting and protecting) to authentically support children and young people.[96]

Existing research also suggests that parental support is one of the most important influences on whether children and young people become involved in activism and whether they remain engaged over time. For example, research conducted by UNICEF (that included focus group discussions in nine countries with 72 children aged seven to 17) shows that parents can both support and restrict participation.[97]

This chimes with Amnesty International's understanding and approach. The organization's research and policy documents (for example the global Youth! Power! Action! Strategy) repeatedly identify the importance of supportive adults – including parents, teachers, mentors and allies – in enabling young people's activism and protecting them from risks.

Research has also shown how societal resistance to recognizing children as political actors remains a significant barrier for child activists.[98] Portrayals and stereotypes of young protesters as disruptive or irresponsible can reduce the perceived legitimacy of youth activism and make participation socially costly. For example, an analysis of media coverage of the Youth for Climate movement found that journalists often constructed youth climate protests through competing narratives of "truancy" versus legitimate political engagement.[99] Another example is in Chile, where protests that were often led by students were described by authorities as vandalism or a "serious breach of the peace", even though most were

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94 Felix Elsen and Jon Ord, "The role of adults in 'youth led' climate groups: Enabling empowerment", April 2021, Frontiers in Political Science, Volume 3, https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2021.641154/full

95 Annie Douglas, "'Collaborators', 'guides', 'facilitators', and 'advocates': Using a spatial lens to understand the roles of NGO practitioners in supporting youth participation", March 2024, Journal of Applied Youth Studies, Volume 7, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-024-00120-7

96 Stephanie C. Serriere and Tennisha Riley, "Heavy on the solidarity, light on the adultism: Adult supports for youth activism", 2024, Democracy & Education, Volume 32, Issue 1, https://doi.org/10.65214/2164-7992.1624

97 UNICEF, *Free and Safe to Protest: Policing Assemblies Involving Children* (previously cited).

98 See, for example, E. Kay M. Tisdall and Patricio Cuevas-Parra, "Beyond the familiar challenges for children and young people's participation rights: The potential of activism" (previously cited).

99 Diana Jacobsson, "Young vs old? Truancy or new radical politics? Journalistic discourses about social protests in relation to the climate crisis", April 2020, Critical Discourse Studies, Volume 18, Issue 4, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17405904.2020.1752758

peaceful, undermining how young people were viewed as legitimate participants.[100] Similarly in Thailand, between 2020 and 2022 the Thai authorities perceived child protesters as "troublemakers" and resorted to various means of repressing children's right to peaceful assembly.[101] The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association also highlights that children protesting in the context of the climate crisis face additional barriers and pressures, including "limitations placed on their access to information as well as threats of violence, including threats by adults," which can limit their ability to exercise their rights.[102]

Children's participation in protest is shaped by a balance between support and restriction. Supportive relationships can build confidence and encourage participation, but fear, stigma, or overly protective attitudes from adults can also act as strong barriers, limiting children's ability to protest.

What is adultism?

This is the belief that adults know better than children and young people simply because they are older. Adultism can lead to children's ideas being ignored or not taken seriously.



What is stigmatization?

Stigmatization means treating a person or a group negatively because of stereotypes, prejudice or misinformation.



100 Amnesty International, "Eyes on Chile: Police violence and command responsibility during the period of social unrest", 14 October 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2020/10/eyes-on-chile-police-violence-at-protests/

101 Amnesty International, *"We Are Reclaiming Our Future": Children's Right to Peaceful Assembly in Thailand* (previously cited).

102 UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as essential to advancing climate justice, 23 July 2021, UN Doc. A/76/222.

Safety and security

KEY FINDING 3:

Safety is a major concern for many children who wish to protest and many fear violence from law enforcement and the possibility of arrest.

Safety is a major concern for many child activists. Although experiences and perceptions of safety vary a lot across regions, children and young people repeatedly raised safety concerns throughout the research, and experiences of abuses or fears of violence or abuse, were mentioned by many children. Some participants described avoiding in-person protests entirely because of fear of violence, arrest or conflict, or stated that their parents would not allow them to join out of fear of violence. In the questionnaire we asked respondents about their biggest barriers to protest and in their responses the possibility of violence from police/law enforcement (which was a barrier for 216 of out 468 respondents) and the possibility of arrest (which was a barrier for 208 out of 468 respondents) were the two most common responses. Issues around safety came up both when we asked about barriers to participation, and also when we asked what children hope will change in the future. This all resonated strongly with young people, for whom safety was also a major concern (indeed, even more prevalent than for children).



Experiences and fears of state repression



Several children spoke of their experiences of state violence and repression. For example, a 17-year-old male participant originally from Russia, living in Argentina, alleges that: "Since [President Javier] Milei took office, there has been a very big change. At the pensioners' march, you show up and you're repressed; other marches don't have as much police repression. At the pensioners' march, I have friends who were tear-gassed".[103]

Other participants spoke of their fears, "due to possible State repression".[104] According to a 17-year-old from Nigeria, protesting is "not that safe".[105] One 13-year-old from Peru described his feelings regarding the police and authorities in his questionnaire response, including his "fear that they would kill my mum, because at that time I would go out with my mum... they can kill us, just for protesting".[106] Another 13-year-old Peruvian participant similarly described protest as "terrifying" because, they alleged, "in Peru, protesting can mean losing your life. Many people who have sought justice have been assassinated".[107] In the opinion of a 17-year-old from New Zealand, "for offline protests, things can go really wrong really fast".[108]

Amnesty International's investigations into human rights abuses suggest that many of these fears are well-founded. For example, research in Mexico published in 2021 documented how authorities responded to feminist protests with unnecessary and excessive force, arbitrary detention, sexual violence by police, stigmatization and criminalization of protesters and violations of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.[109] In Russia, authorities have undermined the right to protest through increasingly restrictive legislation, arbitrary bans on demonstrations, unlawful use of police force, unfair trials, disproportionate fines and imprisonment and criminal prosecution of peaceful protesters,[110] while in Argentina Amnesty International has documented unlawful use of force by federal security forces, arbitrary arrests of protesters, injuries caused by rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons and concerns

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103 17-year-old male with migrant background, Argentina, Spark Circle, 6 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "Desde que asumió [Javier] Milei, hay un cambio muy grande, en la marcha de los jubilados venís y te reprimen, las otras marchas no tienen tanta represión policial. La marcha de los jubilados, tengo compañeros que fueron gaseados."

104 Questionnaire response 7 (Spanish), 7 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "me siento empoderado, esperanzado, pero algo asustado (en las protestas en persona) debido a una posible represión del estado."

105 Questionnaire response 239 (English), 20 November 2025.

106 Questionnaire response 473 (Spanish), 17 January 2026. Originally in Spanish: "nos pueden matar, solo por protestar. En ese tiempo que era pequeño, tenía miedo que mataran a mi mamá, porque salia con mi mamá."

107 Questionnaire response 474 (Spanish), 17 January 2026. Originally in Spanish: "En el Perú, protestar puede significar perder la vida. Al salir a las protestas, muchas personas que piden justicia son asesinadas".

108 Questionnaire response 370 (English), 8 December 2025.

109 Amnesty International, *Mexico: The (R)age of Women: Stigma and Violence Against Women Protesters*, (Index: AMR 41/3724/2021), 3 March 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/3724/2021/en/

110 Amnesty International, *Russia: No Place for Protest* (Index: EUR 46/4328/2021), 12 August 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4328/2021/en/

about the criminalization of peaceful demonstrators.[111] Research published in 2023 concluded that Peruvian security forces used unlawful lethal force against protesters,[112] while in Nigeria, violent policing of nationwide economic protests in August 2024 resulted in at least 24 protesters killed and more than 1,200 detained (including children).[113]

What is criminalization?

States criminalize particular behaviour they deem threatening or harmful to the health, safety, property or welfare of people and use the criminal justice system to regulate such conduct. However, this power has limits. International human rights standards and international criminal law provide some guidance on what states can criminalize, how they should enforce criminal law and what constitutes appropriate punishment. In the context of protest, criminal law, criminal sanctions, or the threat of criminal prosecution are sometimes used by states to unduly restrict the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Some participants in Spark Circles also spoke about seeing police use of force either on the news, or hearing about it from friends, which deterred them from joining future protests. An 11-year-old female participant from Chile spoke about seeing police use water cannons, which made them and their parents scared to go to a protest. She said, "[people] get hurt because they are just exercising their rights".[114] Several children also described how they try to avoid the possibility of violence, for example by "avoiding police violence",[115] or "sticking to quiet areas and trying not to get involved in anything that might cause me trouble. I censor myself/hold back to a certain extent."[116]

> "Yeah, several times I wanted to protest. Even right now, I want to protest against gender-based violence, but I'm mostly afraid, and I want to keep myself safe ... So right now, I don't really want to… I really want to protest, but I'm also thinking about my safety."
>
> — 13-year-old female participant from Kenya.[117]

111 Amnesty International, *Silence is Not an Option: Repression and Impunity in Jujuy* (Index: AMR 13/9390/2025), May 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/AMR1393902025ENGLISH.pdf

112 Amnesty International, *Lethal Racism: Extrajudicial Executions and Unlawful Use of Force by Peru's Security Forces* (Index: AMR 46/6761/2023), 25 May 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr46/6761/2023/en/

113 Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Police used excessive force to violently quash #EndBadGovernance protests", 28 November 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/nigeria-police-used-excessive-force-to-violently-quash-endbadgovernance-protests/

114 11-year old female participant from Chile, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025. Originally in Spanish: "porque para que nadie salga lastimada porque solo están ejerciendo sus derechos".

115 Questionnaire response 224 (French), 20 November 2025. Originally in French: "Éviter les violences policières" (15-year-old female participant from France.)

116 Questionnaire response 384 (Spanish), 14 December 2025. Originally in Spanish: "Generalmente me siento segura porque me mantengo en las zonas calmadas e intento no corear nada que pueda generarme conflicto. Me censuro hasta cierto punto." (17-year-old female participant from Spain.)

117 13-year-old female participant from Kenya, interview, 24 April 2026.

Figure 6: Graph showing children and young people's biggest reported barriers to protest (respondents were free to choose from more than one option. The numbers represent the number of participants who selected each option).



When expressing their wishes and hopes for the future of children's protest, many children called for activism to be safer, for greater security when protesting, for a reduction of police violence and for children to be able to speak up without fear and voice their opinions without negative consequences. A 15-year-old male participant from the UK said: "I would change how the police and law enforcement reacts to usually peaceful protests".[118] A 13-year-old participant from Peru called for "protests to be safer, and may they not infringe upon our rights; and may the police understand that we are protesting for the future of their own children, and that we are a generation standing up for our rights".[119]

> "They need to stop the repression; although I've never experienced it first-hand, I know there are people who do. Children would go out onto the streets more if it weren't for that and for the lack of social awareness."
>
> — 14-year-old female participant from Argentina.[120]

These experiences and fears also resonate strongly with youth participants, many of whom also described their experiences and fears for their safety and that of their families and friends. The questionnaire received more responses from young people than children in certain countries where authorities engage in widespread surveillance and restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, many of whom described their own experiences.[121]

118 Questionnaire response 323 (English), 2 December 2025.

119 Questionnaire response 473 (Spanish), 27 January 2026. Originally in Spanish: "Que las protestas sean más seguras, y que no violen nuestros derechos; y que la policía entiende que estamos protestando por el futuro de sus propios hijos, y que somos una generación que defienden sus derechos".

120 Questionnaire response 516 (Spanish), 1 February 2026. Originally in Spanish: "Que dejen de reprimir, si bien nunca viví la represión en carne propia se que hay gente que la pasa. Los niños saldrían más a la calle si no fuese por eso y por la poca conciencia social que les enseñan. Espero que también los niños/adolescentes no solamente se guíen por lo que les dicen sus padres, sino que se informen individualmente y tengan criterio propio. Y lo más importante, que tengan memoria de los que antes lucharon por sus derechos."

121 For example, the questionnaire received responses from: 15 young people from Cameroon (and no children); 38 young people and five children from Bangladesh; 59 young people and four children from Nigeria; four young people from Afghanistan (no children); two young people from Iran (no children); and 10 young people from Egypt (no children).

One 24-year-old male participant from Afghanistan described how "protest in a country such as Afghanistan is risky and life threatening under current rulers".[122] Others spoke of threats, secret investigations, arbitrary arrests and vulnerability to harassment after participating in protests. One 24-year-old from Cameroon wrote: "protesting in my context is very risky and scary, I have experienced people killed and shot dead before me, by people who were trained to protect innocent people. Just because people want to demonstrate their strong will for change, they're killed in the act, with live bullets not rubber bullets."[123] Several youth activists also described their own experiences as victims of state violence. For example, an 18-year-old Bangladeshi respondent describes:

> "Suddenly the police threw tear gas and fired rubber bullets. I fell in an obnoxious situation that I had never witnessed before, felt my eyes and face were burning, and I wasn't able to see the road clearly because everything seemed opaque. I went there along with my close senior from my locality; he was shot three times in the head by rubber bullets. Later, he was hospitalized for a month".[124]

For a 23-year-old from Nigeria, "protesting in my country is almost seen as [a] crime". He went on to allege that the "government in several cases has hired hoodlums to disrupt peaceful protest rather than providing protection to peaceful protesters pursuant to the provisions of the law. Physical protests have never really been that safe, the government of my country ensure they do everything possible to prevent protests."[125]

Amnesty International's investigations into human rights abuses in these specific countries add context to these allegations. In Afghanistan, research consistently concludes that, since taking power in 2021, the Taliban has pursued a deliberate strategy to eliminate public dissent and quash peaceful protest, using violence, arbitrary detention, intimidation and restrictions on the media to suppress public opposition.[126] Amnesty International has also documented the use of firearms against protesters in Cameroon, particularly in relation to the Anglophone protests in 2016 and 2017 and opposition demonstrations in 2019.[127] This has also been the case in Bangladesh, where the response to protests in 2021, opposition demonstrations in 2023, and nationwide student protests in 2024 used unlawful force.[128] In Nigeria, Amnesty International has documented credible allegations and evidence that pro-government supporters or people allegedly hired by the authorities attacked peaceful protesters, particularly during the #EndSARS protests in October 2020.[129]

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122 Questionnaire response 144 (English), 19 November 2025.

123 Questionnaire response 152 (English), 19 November 2025.

124 Questionnaire response 143 (English), 19 November 2025.

125 Questionnaire response 35 (English), 19 November 2025.

126 See, Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Taliban De Facto Authorities Must End Chilling Crackdown on Dissent* (Index: ASA 11/6722/2023), 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/6722/2023/en/

Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Taliban Must Immediately Stop Arbitrary Arrests of Journalists, Civil Society Activists, Former Government Officials and Those Who Dissent* (Index: ASA 11/5369/2022) 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/5369/2022/en/

127 Amnesty International, "Cameroon: Excessive force that led to deaths of protesters must be urgently investigated", 9 December 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/12/cameroon-excessive-force-that-led-to-deaths-of-protesters-must-be-urgently-investigated/

128 Amnesty International Australia, "Bangladesh: Further video and photographic analysis confirm police unlawfully used lethal and less-lethal weapons against protesters", 2024, https://www.amnesty.org.au/bangladesh-further-video-and-photographic-analysis-confirm-police-unlawfully-used-lethal-and-less-lethal-weapons-against-protesters/

129 Amnesty International, "Nigeria: No justice for victims of police brutality one year after #EndSARS protests", 20 October 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/nigeria-no-justice-for-victims-of-police-brutality-one-year-after-endsars-protests/

Amnesty International, *Nigeria: #EndSARS: Investigate Killings of Protestors* (Index: AFR 44/3254/2020), 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/3254/2020/en/

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

According to the UN Human Rights Committee, "the harassment, intimidation or stigmatization of a person, including arrest, detention, trial or imprisonment for reasons of the opinions they may hold, constitutes a violation of article 19, paragraph 1 [of the ICCPR, the right to hold opinions without interference]."[130]



Violence from members of the public and counter-protesters

Other children spoke specifically about their experience of negative reactions or even violence from the public or counter-protesters. A 13-year-old from Chile described feeling unsafe because "there are people who don't think the same as us who can do us harm".[131] A 17-year-old from New Zealand described how: "Often in social media and sometimes in person, the idea of protesting has been wrongly demonized", as well as frequently encountering "people who disapprove or a counter protest. Reading the news about how some of the clashes of the two protest groups become violent is a cause for concern, even though the authorities are usually present."[132] Indeed, in the multiple-choice question on barriers to protest for children and young people, the fourth most chosen barrier was "violence from other people" (152 people said this, or 34% of respondents). Meanwhile, "negative perceptions of protesters" was a barrier for 105 respondents (24%).

Some young people described being subject to the negative attitudes, and sometimes behaviours, of members of the public. A 20-year-old woman from Nigeria described the reaction of some people to their protest to end "mob violence": "some of the bystanders turned furious while threatening they would continue mob violence especially when someone steals".[133] A 24-year-old from Haiti said: "I took part in a march against violence against women, and some men joined the crowd and started shouting obscenities."[134]

130 HRC, General Comment 34: Article 19: Freedom of opinion and expression. 12 September 2011, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 9.

131 Questionnaire response 8 (Spanish), 9 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "Uno se siente quizás un poco inseguro, ya que hay gente que no piensa igual que nos puede hacer daño".

132 Questionnaire response 370 (English), 8 December 2025.

133 Questionnaire response 71 (English), 19 November 2025.

134 Questionnaire response 90 (French), 19 November 2025. Originally in French: "J' ai participé à une marche contre la violence faite aux femmes et des hommes ont intégré la foule et ont commencé à dire des obsénités".

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

States have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights, including their rights to peacefully assembly. States should take all appropriate measures to facilitate children's participation in peaceful assemblies and to prevent harassment, intimidation, discrimination, violence or attacks against children before, during and after assemblies. Such measures may include ensuring law enforcement officials receive child-rights and child-sensitive police training.

Children should be actively protected from any harm in the context of public assemblies, through nuanced and innovative approaches rather than through unnecessary restriction of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, both offline and online.

What is a counter-protest?

A protest organized in response to another protest, often expressing the opposite viewpoint.

Surveillance

In many Spark Circles, when speaking about their experiences of taking action and potential barriers to participating in protest, some participants spoke about a feeling of being watched while protesting, both online and in-person. One 17-year-old from Taiwan described how, "due to relations with China, sometimes expressing opinions or protesting in Taiwan may lead to us being wanted by China".[135] In the experience of a 17-year-old from the Philippines: "It's harder when civic space narrows through surveillance... And it's harder when laws meant to protect public order are interpreted in ways that chill public participation."[136]

What is civic space?

The environment or set of conditions, online and offline, that allows people and groups to speak out, organize, protest, and participate in public life without fear.

What is surveillance?

The monitoring, tracking, or collection of information about people, whether online or offline. This can be mass surveillance against the general population (or a particular demographic), while other times it is targeted against a particular individual or group.



135 17-year-old female from Taiwan, Spark Circle, 5 December 2025.

136 17-year-old male from the Philippines, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.

> "Based on my experience in Russia, I see that a very similar path is being taken here [in Argentina]. The right to protest keeps shrinking, and the state silences you. Regarding surveillance, I feel influenced; I see a lot of media control – a fairly subtle way of pushing a political agenda through the media."
>
> — 17-year-old male participant from Russia, living in Argentina.[137]

Participants in one Spark Circle said they had heard about police visiting homes of protesters and hearing directly from friends in the Netherlands who had been visited by police after attending a protest. One 21-year-old participant from the Netherlands, speaking specifically of their experience of protesting when they were a child, said "think of... house visits to activists that you... hear of every now and again, where the local cop comes to the house of the activists, the legal justification is also quite shaky, but it does happen, and I think especially for young people".[138]

These findings resonate with research that Amnesty International has previously carried out and concerns previously raised about surveillance and its impact on freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression.[139] This includes a range of tactics, such as video surveillance tied to facial recognition technology,[140] spyware, phone hacking and social media monitoring,[141] among others. Children and young people are especially vulnerable to the consequences of surveillance because of its chilling effects, their reliance on digital platforms to organize, and the ways in which reprisals can affect multiple aspects of their lives (such as education, their relationships with and dependence on adults, as well as psychological impacts). Amnesty International has documented the use of surveillance against children and its effects in several locations. For example, in Thailand, children have experienced criminalization, intimidation, surveillance and other forms of violence due to their involvement in protests.[142] Research into the right to protest in 21 European countries revealed that surveillance measures (including video surveillance, facial recognition, social media monitoring, home visits and undercover policing) can have a chilling effect on participation, including by children.[143]

What is a chilling effect?

Harsh restrictions on protesters, and other forms of human rights violations such as unwarranted surveillance, create a "chilling effect", meaning they are likely to dissuade people from exercising their rights in the future.

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137 17-year-old male, migrant background, Argentina, Spark Circle, 6 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "Viendo mi experiencia rusa estoy viendo que se está tomando un camino muy parecido, cada vez se acorta más el derecho a la protesta y te silencia el Estado, sobre la vigilancia, me siento influenciado, veo mucho tema control de medios, una forma bastante sutil de meter agenda política dentro de los medios."

138 21-year-old participant identifying with she/they pronouns, the Netherlands, Spark Circle, 26 January 2026.

139 See Amnesty International, *Impact of Digital and AI-Assisted Surveillance on Assembly and Association Rights, Including Chilling Effects,* November 2025 https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/0484/2025/en/

140 Amnesty International, *Recording Dissent: Camera Surveillance at Peaceful Protests in the Netherlands* (Index: EUR 35/8469/2024), 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur35/8469/2024/en/

141 Amnesty International, *Uncovering the Iceberg: The Digital Surveillance Crisis Wrought by States and the Private Sector* (Index: DOC 10/4491/2021), 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/doc10/4491/2021/en/

142 Amnesty International, *"We Are Reclaiming Our Future": Children's Right to Peaceful Assembly in Thailand* (previously cited).

143 Amnesty International, *Under Protected and Over Restricted* (previously cited).

> “And I'm not like, I'm not afraid to say my opinion, but it's hard to say it, because if I want to talk about my opinion regarding Israeli occupation, maybe I'll go to jail.”
>
> — 13-year-old female participant from Palestine.[144]

Intersectional safety risks



Amnesty International heard from children about how the risks they face vary according to different identities, depending on the characteristics of the protesters (for example, disability or migrant status), and also according to the issue they are protesting about and the nature of the protest. This is the case within the same country, where risks are different for different children depending on their identities and circumstances.

For example, participants mentioned major differences in levels of safety and danger between different types of protest. One 16-year-old from the UK who described themselves as gender fluid and having a physical disability said: “Honestly, it depends on the type. The DPAC/CAC[145] marches were always very well thought out in terms of access, and the marches were never too long. My other marches, (Palestine Action, JSO, ER,[146] Trans Rights) were longer, more tiring and often more dangerous for me”.[147] A 17-year-old living in Argentina described the additional risks he faces due to his migrant status: “With the new DNU,[148] if they catch me, my residency can be cancelled. That creates a lot of fear”.[149]

144 13-year-old female participant from Palestine, interview, 17 April 2026.

145 Disabled People Against Cuts / Crips Against Cuts.

146 Just Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion.

147 Questionnaire response 213 (English), 20 November 2025.

148 DNU (Decreto de Necesidad y Urgencia) in Argentina is an executive order allowing the President to act in areas that would normally require legislation by Congress.

149 17-year-old male from a migrant background, Argentina, Spark Circle, 6 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: “más que nada la represión, imponerle el miedo a la gente. Con el nuevo DNU a mi si me agarran me dan de baja la residencia, te agarra mucho miedo, la mayoría son marchas”.

In the Spark Circles, there was a range of feelings expressed about the extent to which participants feel safe protesting. Some mentioned how safety is not necessarily something that they worry about, and they feel safe if they follow the rules, have permissions, go to protests with other people such as friends and family, or participate in well-organized protests, with support from an NGO, for instance. Some participants also described police presence as playing a protective role in certain contexts. Participants from South Korea and Ireland noted that police were present to ensure safety, particularly at large demonstrations. For example, one 17-year-old male South Korean participant described how: "At very big protests in the 80s, [the police] were there to stop the protest… but now I think they're actually coming to protect the protesters."[150] One 15-year-old male participant from Ireland said: "Without the help of the Gardaí [police] in Ireland, protests would be a lot harder".[151]

> "[I]f you follow the regulations and if you have consent from the government and the police, you are protected by the authorities, so the authorities do not harm you, unless you use violence."
>
> — 17-year-old male participant from South Korea.[152]

This participant's reflection illustrates a common understanding that participation in protests requires state permission. Under international human rights law, assemblies should not require prior authorization and authorities remain obligated to respect, protect and facilitate peaceful assemblies and to refrain from causing harm, even where administrative requirements have not been complied with.

There was recognition that, in contexts where the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression are better protected, children and young people are less likely to experience violence. Nevertheless, some youth participants from the Netherlands and France mentioned witnessing instances of unlawful force by law enforcement during protests. For example, one 24-year-old female student from the Netherlands described how "it was just really scary to listen that the police was quite violent to an extent that I didn't think would happen, I guess, especially not against students."[153]

> "Protesting in France is less dangerous than in some other countries; however, there is still significant armed repression and the police are violent."
>
> — 21-year-old female participant from France.[154]

Amnesty International has documented these increased safety risks and intersecting barriers in previous research. The organization's research on protest rights in Europe scrutinizes the disproportionate and discriminatory impact of specific laws, policies and practices on specific groups, including migrants, children, LGBTI and gender non-conforming people, Black people, Arab people, Roma and people belonging to other racialized groups, sex workers, people with disabilities, and climate justice protesters.[155]

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150 17-year-old female from South Korea (female participant 2), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.

151 15-year-old male from Ireland, Spark Circle, 9 December 2025.

152 17-year-old male from South Korea (male participant 1), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.

153 24-year-old female participant, the Netherlands, Spark Circle, 26 January 2026.

154 Questionnaire response 318 (French), 1 December 2025. Originally in French: "La protestation en France est moins dangereuse que celle dans certains pays, toutefois la répression armée reste majeure et les forces de l'ordre violente."

155 Amnesty International, *Under Protected and Over Restricted* (previously cited).

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

The UN Human Rights Committee states that "particular effort should be made to ensure equal and effective protection of the rights of groups or individuals who have historically experienced discrimination."[156] This includes women, children and young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, members of ethnic and religious minorities, displaced persons, persons with albinism, Indigenous Peoples and individuals who have been discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The Committee has highlighted that "the recognition of the right of peaceful assembly imposes a corresponding obligation on State parties to respect and ensure its exercise without discrimination. This requires States to allow such assemblies to take place without unwarranted interference and to facilitate the exercise of the right and to protect the participants."[157]



Intersectional safety risks were also reiterated by youth participants. For example, some highlighted different types of responses depending on the issue or cause they are protesting about. A 23-year-old from Ecuador also spoke of the difference between her experience participating in "feminist marches and sit-ins", which she considered mainly safe, and "national strikes, together with our indigenous colleagues", in which she alleged "palpable racism, as well as extreme violence on the part of the national police and the military".[158] This chimes with concerns raised by Amnesty International that in 2025 Ecuadorian authorities carried out mass arrests and used unlawful force against protests led by Indigenous, social and trade union organizations, and opened abusive criminal proceedings against and froze the bank accounts of social leaders and protesters.[159]

An 18-year-old female participant from Belgium described how "I found that climate protests, for example, were much safer than those for Palestine. So, I quickly realized that the cause had an impact on people's pacifism".[160] As mentioned, the risks children face vary according to their identities and the circumstances and nature of the protest. As such, it is important to note that, while this is the experience of one individual, Amnesty International has also documented the security challenges and threats that climate protesters face in many countries.[161] One 21-year-old female participant described how she risks

156 OHCHR, Joint report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on the proper management of assemblies, 4 February 2016, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/66.

157 The HRC's General Comment 37 clarifies that the right of peaceful assembly belongs to everyone and must be guaranteed without discrimination. It specifically identifies groups requiring particular protection, including women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and LGBTQI+ persons.

158 Questionnaire response 148 (Spanish), 20 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "La mayor parte de protestas a las que he asistido son marchas y plantones feministas, en estos espacios siempre me siento empedrada y segura, aún cuando a veces existe represión policial no había experimentado una violencia mayor. Sin embargo, en los últimos años he podido participar de paros nacionales, de la mano de compañeros indigenas, y debo reconocer que es un ambiente distinto, sigue existiendo el amor por la lucha, la alegría y rebeldía sin embargo también existe un racismo claramente palpable y además violencia extrema por parte de policía nacional y militares."

159 Amnesty International, "Ecuador: Alert over repression of protests, judicial independence and enforced disappearances", 8 October 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/ecuador-alerta-por-represion-a-protestas-independencia-judicial-y-desapariciones-forzadas/

160 Questionnaire response 1 (French), 14 October 2025. Originally in French: "en personne, je trouvais que les manifestations pour le climat par exemple, étaient beaucoup plus sûres que celle pour la Palestine. Donc j'ai vite compris que le sujet impactait le pacifisme des gens."

161 See, for example, Amnesty International, "Fossil fuels: Bad for the climate, bad full stop", 23 November 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2023/11/fossil-fuels-bad-for-the-climate-bad-full-stop/

deportation from France due to her activism, with "the Palestinian cause being a [viewed as a] synonym for condoning terrorism".[162]

This resonates with existing research by Amnesty International, which has identified in recent years a worrying pattern across Europe, where public assemblies organized to express solidarity with Palestinian people have faced disproportionate restrictions. These restrictions include pre-emptive bans on protests, the banning of certain chants, Palestinian flags, *keffiyehs* and other symbols; as well as the use of unnecessary or excessive force, arbitrary detention of peaceful protesters, and the dispersal of peaceful protests, including student encampments and protests that did not result in serious and sustained disruption.[163] The grounds of 'public order' or 'public safety' are often used to ban or severely restrict Palestinian solidarity demonstrations in ways that not only fail to comply with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, but also entrench racial prejudice and stereotyping, and raise serious concerns regarding the failure of European countries to combat racism and all other forms of discrimination and tackle institutionalized racism towards Arab people and Muslim people. These actions have occurred within a wider context of stigmatizing and harmful rhetoric often enunciated by public officials – including high-level politicians – against protesters, as well as a wide range of measures adopted by various European states aimed at restricting freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association and stifling dissent connected to solidarity with Palestinians or voices critical of Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

Amnesty International considers the suppression of Palestinian perspectives in public and political discourse to be a violation of the right to non-discrimination. The expression of frustration, or indeed anger, in the context of assemblies cannot justify general suspicion, stigmatization and criminalization of people of (or perceived to be of) Palestinian or Arab descent, or Muslims – and their allies, including the many Jewish people who stand in solidarity with Palestinians.

Other youth participants shared how the risks they face are exacerbated by aspects of their identity. A 21-year-old female participant from Argentina who identifies as LGBTQIA+ expressed her wish for "less online harassment. All of us activists are vulnerable to harassment on social media, but in the case of children, it is a more sensitive issue because of the risks to their personal safety and the intimidating effects it has".[164] Another 19-year-old male Pakistani participant described how, as part of an ethnic minority, he is subject to discrimination: "we have no rights and we are [treated like] animals worse than animals. I as Pashtun have been colonized to the point that I don't have any anything else without submitting to rule of military here. My lands and race are slowly going to become extinct".[165] Amnesty International has documented a pattern of alleged human rights violations and discrimination affecting Pashtun communities and activists, including enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, restrictions on peaceful assembly, censorship and excessive use of counterterrorism laws.[166]

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162 Questionnaire response 318 (French), 1 December 2025. Originally in French: "la cause palestinienne étant synonyme d'apologie du terrorisme".
In France, hundreds of people, including children, have been charged in the past two years for "condoning terrorism", including for comments they have posted on Facebook. See for example, Christophe Turgis, "Charlie Hebdo : à Nantes, un adolescent de 16 ans poursuivi pour 'apologie du terrorisme' sur Facebook," France 3, 17 January 2015, http://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/pays-de-la-loire/2015/01/17/charlie-hebdo-nantes-unadolescent-de-16-ans-poursuivi-pour-apologie-du-terrorisme-sur-facebook-634720.html [in French].

163 Amnesty International, *Under Protected and Over Restricted* (previously cited).

164 21-year-old female participant from Argentina, Spark Circle, 6 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "Desearía que hubiera menos acoso en línea. Todes les activistas somos vulnerable al acoso en redes, pero en el caso de les niñes es más sensible por los riesgos de seguridad personal y por los efectos amedrentadores que tiene."

165 Questionnaire response 81 (English), 19 November 2025.

166 See, for example, Amnesty International, *Pakistan: Peaceful Pashtun Activists Face Criminal Cases* (Index: ASA 33/8079/2018), 2018, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/8079/2018/en/
Amnesty International, *Pakistan: End Enforced Disappearance of Activists: Hanif Pashteen and Noor Ullah Tareen* (Index: ASA 33/0949/2026), 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/0949/2026/en/

Analysis

The key role that experiences and perceptions of safety play in children's ability and willingness to protest is supported by existing research. The literature identifies fears of violence, arrest, intimidation, harassment, retaliation and general unsafety as factors that can discourage participation or limit the forms of activism that young people undertake. For example, a UN report based on interviews with nearly 100 young activists from 37 countries documented concerns about arrests, smear campaigns, physical attacks, and exclusion from support systems available to adult activists.[167] Another study of young activists in Sweden found that experiences and perceptions of "unsafety" were a significant feature of youth activism.[168] Sarah Pickard documents concerns regarding aggressive protest policing, surveillance, crowd-control tactics, and the use of coercive measures against young demonstrators in the UK.[169]

This research also describes the chilling effect, suggesting that even when young people are not directly arrested or harmed, witnessing arrests, heavy policing, surveillance, or punitive state responses can discourage future participation. It supports our finding that the perception that protest may be unsafe can therefore be as influential as direct experiences of repression in deterring protest. Another example of this is in Russia, where Amnesty International found that children and their families have been targeted for speaking out against Russia's war on Ukraine, including through threats of prosecution or family separation. Even the risk of these consequences is "horrifying enough to deter many people from speaking up".[170]

Research also highlights the possibility for surveillance and monitoring by state authorities to contribute to self-censorship and reduced participation among children and young people, particularly where protest movements have experienced arrests or other forms of state intervention.[171]

What is more, a 2024 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders found that young activists often face barriers that are distinct from those experienced by adults because they have fewer resources, less access to legal support, and greater dependence on adults for protection and permission. Another key finding from that report, which provides further evidence about the importance of intersectional risks, is that experiences of activism differ significantly across groups of young people and that barriers may be intensified when children also belong to marginalized racial, ethnic, gender, disability, or sexual minority groups.[172]

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167 OHCHR, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: We are not just the future – challenges faced by child and youth human rights defenders, 17 January 2024, UN Doc. A/HRC/55/50. Also reported by the Guardian: Nina Lakhani, "Youth activists need protection against smear campaigns and arrests, says UN expert", 11 March 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/11/youth-chidlren-activists-protection-smear-campaigns-arrests-un-report

168 Anna-Britt Coe, "Everyday violence and crosscutting conditions shaping social and political dimensions of unsafety in youth activism", 2022, Young, Volume 30, Issue 5, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/11033088221086088

169 Sarah Pickard, "Excessive force, coercive policing and criminalisation of dissent: Repressing young people's protest in twenty-first century Britain", 2019, Revista Internacional de Sociología, Volume 77, Issue 4, https://doi.org/10.3989/ris.2019.77.4.19.002

170 Amnesty International, *Russia: "Your Children Will Go to an Orphanage": Children and the Crackdown on Protest* (Index: EUR 46/8085/2024), 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/8085/2024/en/

171 See, for example, Martin R. Albrecht and others, "Collective information security in large-scale urban protests: The case of Hong Kong", 2021, Proceedings of the 30th USENIX Security Symposium, https://www.usenix.org/conference/usenixsecurity21/presentation/albrecht

172 OHCHR, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: We are not just the future (previously cited). Also reported by the Guardian: Nina Lakhani, "Youth activists need protection against smear campaigns and arrests, says UN expert" (previously cited).

Children's participation in protest is hugely influenced by their experiences and perceptions of safety. The findings from this research add further evidence for the need to ensure that children can participate in peaceful protests in a safe, enabling and rights-respecting environment. States have an obligation not only to protect children from violence (Article 19 of the CRC), but also to respect, protect and fulfil their right to peaceful assembly (Article 15 of the CRC).

Concretely, states must take appropriate measures to facilitate children's participation in peaceful assemblies while protecting them from unlawful force by law enforcement actors. Law enforcement officials should receive child-rights and child-sensitive policing training and the management of public assemblies should consider children's rights at all stages of planning and decision-making.[173] Where the use of force is strictly unavoidable, particular care must be taken to minimize harm to children and to ensure that any use of force, including use of less lethal weapons, complies with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and precaution. States must ensure prompt, independent and effective investigations and accountability for human rights violations committed during the policing of protests.

States must also protect children from violence, intimidation and harassment by non-state actors, including during counter-protests.

What is self-censorship?

When someone holds back from sharing their views because they are worried about criticism, punishment, surveillance or other consequences. Imagine it like pressing 'delete' before posting something online, because you're afraid of how people might react.



173 CRC Committee, Comments on Human Rights Committee's Revised Draft General Comment No. 37 (previously cited), p. 6.

Online activism



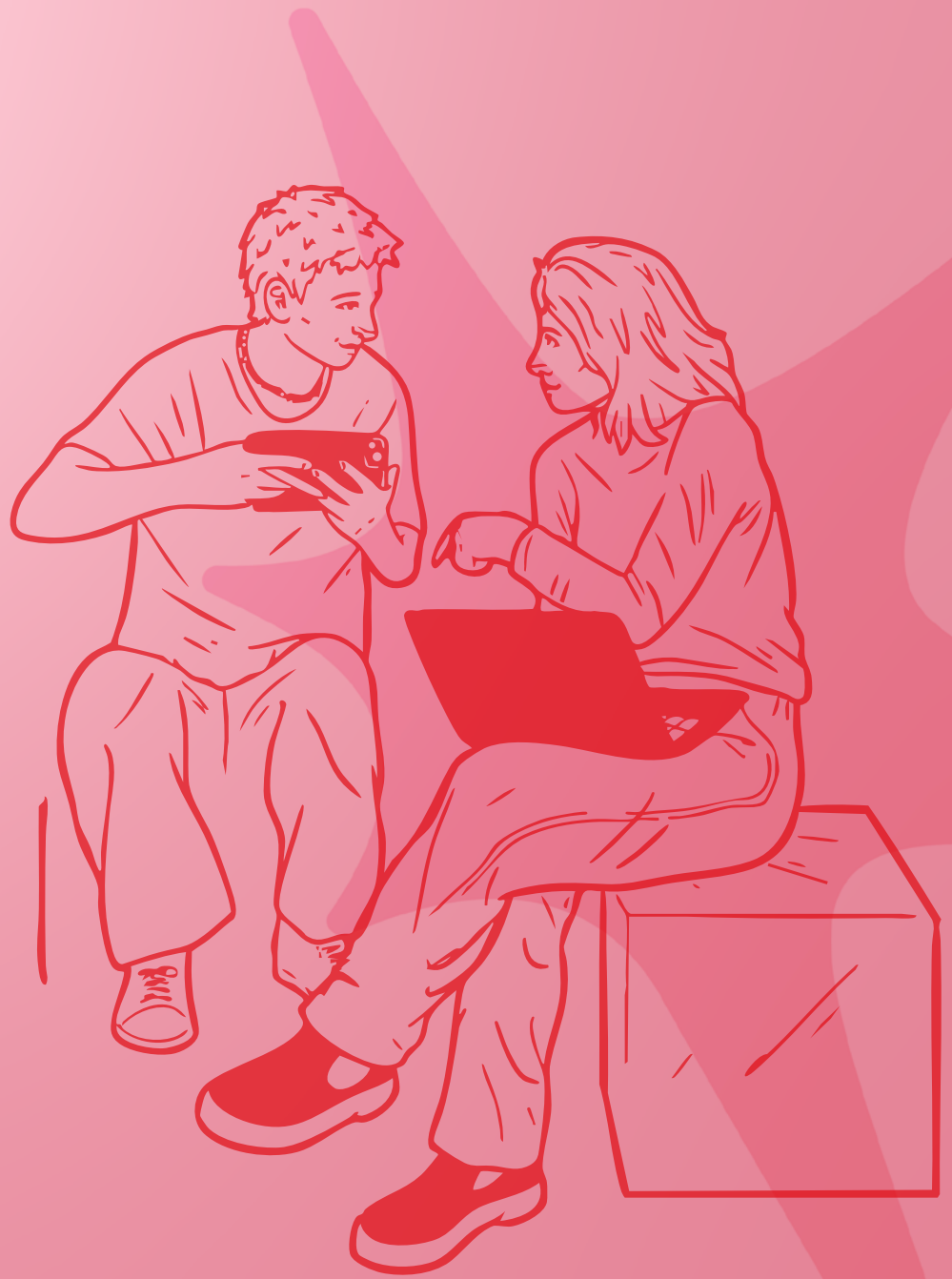
KEY FINDING 4:

While children reported overall to feel safer during online forms of protest, concerns about the collection and misuse of their personal data and online harassment continue to present significant barriers to their activism.

Children shared with us how online protest can open up opportunities for activism which would not be possible for them otherwise; and, for many, online spaces have enabled child and youth activists to connect with others and learn in relation to their activism.

Research participants also reported feeling far safer protesting online than offline. Of the questionnaire respondents most (264 out of 347) reported feeling safe protesting online compared to just 126 out of 288 who reported feeling safe protesting offline. Both online and offline, the young people who responded to the questionnaire reported feeling somewhat less safe protesting compared to child respondents.

Nonetheless, children also spoke of the major drawbacks and challenges of online protest, such as mass surveillance (as mentioned above), misuse of their personal data and online harassment. These concerns resonated strongly with youth protesters too.



Opportunities brought about by online protest

Many young people shared that social media has enabled them to meet others, learn about issues they care about, and speak up in ways that might not always be possible through in-person protest alone. Online spaces were seen as particularly important for young people facing barriers such as busy schedules, safety concerns, or a lack of parental support to attend physical protests. For instance, one 17-year-old female from South Korea described how: "We have to go to school in the daytime. So I think it's way easier to share our voices online than offline."[174] For many, online activism was also described as a space for personal growth, skill building, and finding a sense of voice and belonging. One 17-year-old female participant from Ireland described her experience in this regard: "I got involved in activism through social media. I grew as an activist through social media. I've made some of my best friends through activism because of social media. I've also learned skills, and I've always found my voice, I've found my passion."[175]

> "Many people and a lot of movements actually start online where people can connect to each other globally. So, I think online protesting is meaningful in some way".
>
> — 17-year-old male participant from South Korea.[176]

Safety, surveillance and restrictions in the digital environment

Some children felt that protesting online is a safer alternative to protesting in-person. For example, a 17-year-old from Nigeria described how:

> "Personally, I focus on online activism, using digital platforms to raise awareness and mobilize support. I find it safer and equally effective in driving change. Online protests allow me to engage with global communities and contribute to movements without compromising my safety".[177]



174 17-year-old female participant from South Korea (female participant 2), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.
175 17-year-old female participant from Ireland, Spark Circle, 9 December 2025.
176 17-year-old male participant from South Korea (male participant 2), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.
177 Questionnaire response 163 (English), 19 November 2026.

Although many children overall feel safer protesting online, the feeling of being monitored or spied on online is widespread among child protesters. For one 17-year-old female participant from Argentina: "The environment around protests, especially online, is getting harsher. Surveillance is stronger".[178] Participants also spoke about this causing them to be more careful about which online platforms to use (for example, choosing a more secure messaging app) or even to leave some social media platforms.

Some participants who were concerned about surveillance and restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly described the challenges they face. For example, a 15-year-old from China explained: "Here, posting on the global internet requires a VPN,[179] which most people here do not have access to. Many young people simply lack a platform where they can voice what they care about."[180]

A 13-year-old Palestinian activist explained: "On social media, if you're going to talk about Israeli occupation problems, when I used to talk about that, the views on the video go lower. And when I talk about any other topic, it goes higher".[181] A 17-year-old originally from Russia, based in Argentina, describes a similar experience: "I see very strong control on social media, especially when I want to share things about Gaza."[182]

Some other children also expressed concern about restrictions on social media use for children. For example, a 17-year-old male participant from Ireland (where the government has proposed introducing a legal ban preventing children from accessing social media) expressed this concern:

> "For people under the age of 16, being banned from social media also cuts them off from being able to voice their opinions or being able to protest through social media… Cutting them off from social media will also negatively affect youth being able to spread their perspective".[183]



178 17-year-old-female participant from Argentina, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.

179 A Virtual Private Network (VPN) masks your Internet Protocol (IP) address, creating a private connection from a public Wi-Fi connection.

180 Questionnaire response 211 (English), 20 November 2025.

181 13-year-old female participant from Palestine, interview, 17 April 2026.
Such shadow-banning of (pro) Palestinian content has been researched by Amnesty International and others. See, for example, Amnesty International, "Global: Zionism/Zionist hate speech policy review must not stifle legitimate criticism of Israel's oppressive policies", 9 February 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/global-zionism-zionist-hate-speech-policy-review-must-not-stifle-legitimate-criticism-of-israels-oppressive-policies/
Human Rights Watch, "Meta's broken promises: Systemic censorship of Palestine content on Instagram and Facebook", 21 December 2023, https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/21/metas-broken-promises/systemic-censorship-palestine-content-instagram-and
7amleh, "New research reveals systematic suppression of Palestinian digital content across Meta platforms", 2026, https://7amleh.org/post/meta-suppression-of-palestinian-content-en

182 17-year-old male with a migrant background, Argentina, Spark Circle, 6 November 2025. Originally in Spanish: "hay mucho odio, veo muy fuerte el control en las redes, muchas veces cuando quiero compartir lo de Gaza".

183 17-year-old male participant from Ireland, Spark Circle, 9 December 2025.

Amnesty International advocates that protecting children online starts with platform design, rather than blanket social media bans. Indeed, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has advised: "States need to require tech companies to embed safety into their platforms by design, instead of shifting the burden to parents and children."[184] Instead of introducing blanket bans, measures suggested by the UN High Commissioner, for which Amnesty International also advocates, include guardrails around age verification processes, mandatory child rights impact assessments, and meaningful consultation with children in the design, governance and regulation of social media platforms and the digital environment. These steps should be backed up by mandated transparency, strengthened oversight and accountability for companies, and access to remedy for children whose rights are violated.[185]

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

The CRC explicitly protects children's right to privacy in Article 16. The article states that no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

Although the CRC predates the widespread use of digital technologies, the CRC Committee has since clarified that the protections afforded by Article 16 apply fully in the digital environment.

The CRC Committee explains that children have the right to privacy online, including protection of:

- personal data,
- digital communications,
- identity,
- location information, and
- freedom from unlawful or arbitrary surveillance and profiling.

The Committee also emphasizes that states should regulate digital services to ensure that children's privacy is respected and protected.[186]



184 OHCHR, "Protection of children online needs to be done right – UN Human Rights Office issues guidelines for child safety online", 29 May 2026, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/05/protection-children-online-needs-be-done-right-un-human-rights-office-issues

185 OHCHR, "Protection of children online needs to be done right" (previously cited).

186 CRC Committee, General Comment 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, 2 March 2021, UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/25.

Exposure to online hate, harassment and misinformation



> "As soon as you post something… you are exposing yourself to hate."
>
> — 17-year-old female participant from Argentina.[188]

Children also spoke of exposure to online hate, harassment, misinformation, and the emotional and mental health strain of using online platforms. A 17-year-old female from South Korea described how: "There's also the issue of misinformation or oversimplifying complex issues [online]".[187]

These sentiments and experiences described by children also resonated with young people. Some young people also expressed the feeling that they are safe (or safer) protesting online. A 24-year-old from Pakistan wrote "I feel it's totally safe to protest online",[189] while a 24-year-old from Ethiopia said "I feel unsafe when protesting physically but normal in online".[190] Others explained that they face major risks protesting online, such as a Cameroonian activist who described how "online protest is usually responded to with threats on us the protesters and even secret investigations into the protesters, which leads to arbitrary arrests".[191]

STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

CRC Article 16 states that children must be protected from unlawful attacks on their honour and reputation, while Article 19 stipulates that states must protect children from "all forms of physical or mental violence".

The CRC Committee has stated: "When children express their political or other views and identities in the digital environment, they may attract criticism, hostility, threats or punishment. States parties should protect children from cyberaggression and threats, censorship, data breaches and digital surveillance." [192]

The CRC Committee has said that states parties should take all appropriate measures to protect children from risks to their right to life, survival and development, including risks relating to content, contact, conduct and contract. These encompass, among other things, violent and sexual content, cyberaggression and harassment, gambling, exploitation and abuse. It encourages governments to regulate digital platforms in ways that are lawful, necessary, proportionate, and balanced with children's rights to access information and freedom of expression.[193]

187 17-year-old female participant from South Korea (female participant 2), Spark Circle, 26 February 2026
188 17-year-old female participant, Argentina, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.
189 Questionnaire response 51 (English), 19 November 2025.
190 Questionnaire response 123 (English), 19 November 2025.
191 Questionnaire response 294 (English), 25 November 2025.
192 CRC Committee, General Comment 25 (previously cited), para. 60.
193 CRC Committee, General Comment 25 (previously cited).

Analysis

Once again, these findings resonate with existing research. This includes research which has found that online protest has significantly expanded opportunities for children and young people to participate in civic and political action. For example, the Digital Wellness Lab notes that digital technologies have removed many of the physical and geographic barriers that have traditionally limited children and young people's participation in activism, allowing them to engage in activism in ways that may not be possible through other forms of protest.[194] Amnesty International's research, among others, has confirmed the use of digital platforms as critical tools for activism for children and young people – for example in Kenya – "in enabling young people to speak up and mobilize support for young people's concerns and frustrations in a political system that is dominated by older generations".[195]

There is also existing research in which some children and young people, particularly marginalized youth, have explicitly reported feeling safer online in comparison to in-person protest. For example, a survey by Hopelab and the Born This Way Foundation found that many LGBTQ+ young people reported feeling safer and more supported online than in physical spaces.[196]

Nonetheless, despite these positive aspects, there is a body of research emerging which documents the vast challenges and risks associated with online protest. Amnesty International has carried out research on how government and allied groups in Kenya are increasingly weaponizing digital platforms to stifle protests as part of broader repressive measures designed to shut down digitally-organized dissent.[197] Another Amnesty International study reveals how the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has also increasingly weaponized digital tools, misinformation and vague anti-terror laws to harass, intimidate and repress young activists in the Philippines.[198] Studies have also found that awareness of surveillance can reduce online expression and encourage self-censorship.[199]

A study carried out by Amnesty International found that many child and young human rights defenders experienced online harassment because of their activism.[200] The study, published in 2024, found that harassment can also create a chilling effect, limiting children's willingness and ability to protest by creating fear, anxiety and self-censorship. Harassment can push children out of digital spaces, undermine their confidence, and disproportionately silence marginalized groups, thereby restricting their rights to freedom of expression, association, and participation in civic life.

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194 Digital Wellness Lab, *Advocacy and Activism Online*, 2024, https://digitalwellnesslab.org/research-briefs/advocacy-and-activism-online/

195 Amnesty International, *"This Fear, Everyone is Feeling It": Tech-facilitated Violence Against Young Activists in Kenya* (Index: AFR 32/0471/2025), 2025, https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/AFR3204712025ENGLISH.pdf p. 25.

196 Hopelab and Born This Way Foundation, *Without It I Wouldn't be Here Today: LGBTQ+ Young People's Experiences in Online Spaces*, 2025, https://hopelab.org/stories/without-it-i-wouldnt-be-here

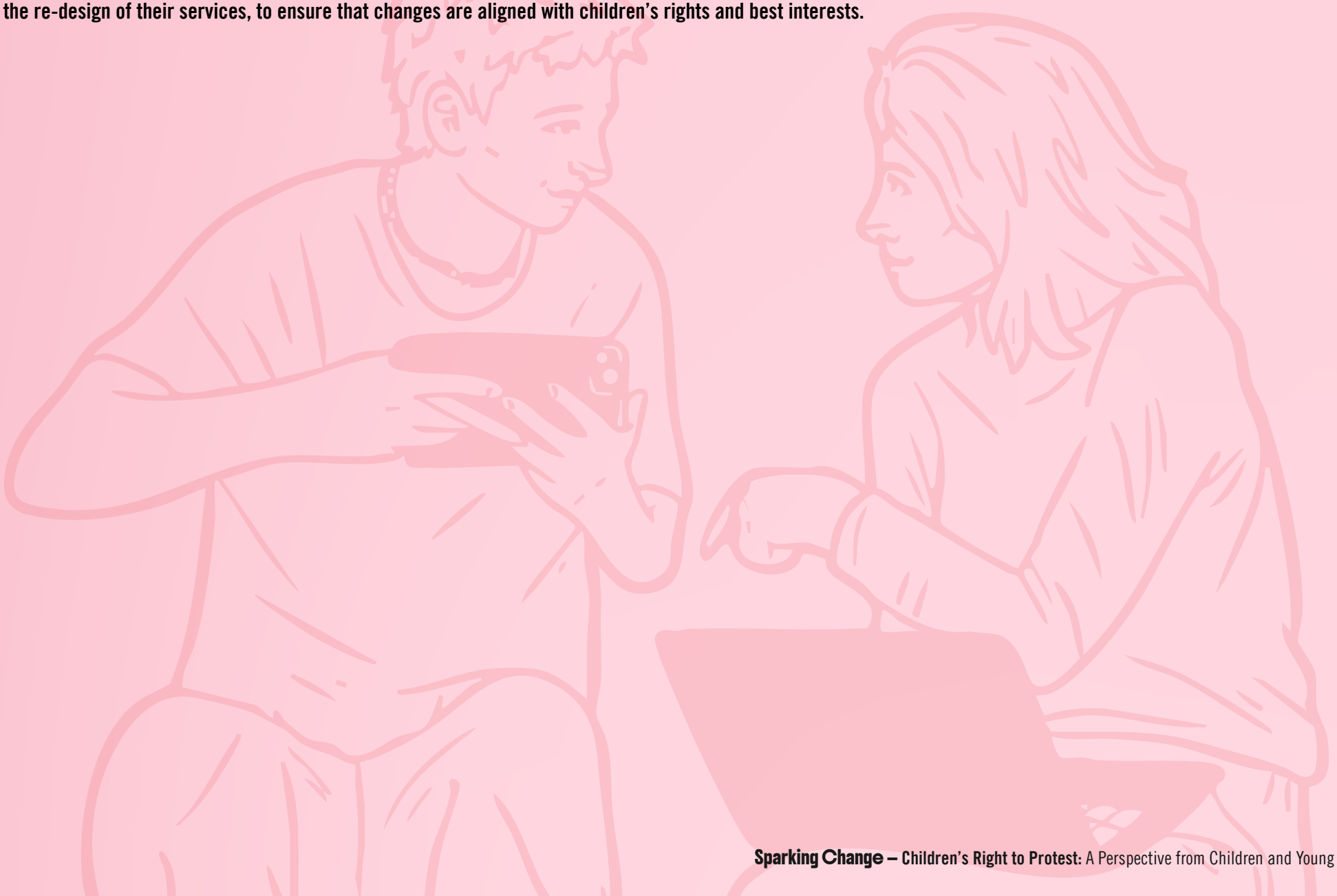
197 Amnesty International, *"This Fear, Everyone is Feeling It"* (previously cited).

198 Amnesty International, *"I Turned My Fear Into Courage": Red-Tagging and State Violence Against Young Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines* (Index: ASA 35/8574/2024), 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa35/8574/2024/en/

199 Jonathon W. Penney, "Internet surveillance, regulation, and chilling effects online", 2017, Internet Policy Review, Volume 6, Issue 2, https://policyreview.info/articles/analysis/internet-surveillance-regulation-and-chilling-effects-online-comparative-case

200 Amnesty International, "Three out of five young activists face online harassment globally for posting human rights content", 1 July 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/three-out-five-young-activists-face-online-harassment-globally-for-posting-human-rights-content/

These findings strongly highlight the need for further steps to ensure that online spaces enable children to express themselves and engage in activism safely. Governments must refrain from unlawful surveillance and take appropriate measures to protect children from harm in the digital environment while respecting and fulfilling their rights. Governments should regulate social media companies in line with international human rights law and standards, including to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights to privacy, health, non-discrimination and freedom of expression. Social media companies should address harmful surveillance-based practices and meaningfully involve children in the re-design of their services, to ensure that changes are aligned with children's rights and best interests.



Protest strategies and enablers

KEY FINDING 5:

Key strategies and enablers – such as increased access to information, accompaniment, mentorship and safe spaces – are needed for children and young people to be able to effectively participate and stay safe during protest.

Through this research, Amnesty International was keen to gather not just information about children's experiences and feelings about protesting, but also their hopes and wishes for the future of protest. While Finding 1 – the need to be listened to and for their demands to be met – was children's greatest wish for the future, other key enabling and supportive factors were also mentioned, including access to information, accompaniment, mentorship, child-friendly spaces and practical support.



> "Too often, we are encouraged to raise our voices but not given the structures to protect, guide, or support us when the noise fades. Protests and mobilizations should come with strong safeguarding measures, mentorship opportunities, and spaces for emotional care."
>
> — 17-year-old from the Philippines who describes themselves as non-binary and a member of an ethnic minority.[201]

201 Questionnaire response 2 (English), 15 October 2025.

Access to information

Access to information was stressed as being key to children exercising their right to protest. Some research participants mentioned this in the context of their education in terms of developing awareness, critical thinking and knowledge of one's rights to become active, thoughtful citizens.

Children stressed the importance of education and educational institutions giving them access to information about their rights. A young person from the Philippines described the kind of education they want: "We want civic education that actually teaches young people their rights, not just the rules they're expected to obey".[202] A 14-year-old male participant from South Africa mentioned that, in their experience: "You don't really hear anything from school, at least in South Africa... You don't hear the effects of protest or anything near or close to protesting."[203]

Other participants highlighted the importance of access to information about human rights and protesting in terms of shaping children's attitudes towards protest. For example, a 15-year-old from New Zealand, who identifies as LGBTQIA+ and neurodivergent, stressed the need for human rights education "because so many people I know think that protest of any form is ineffective, or they have a negative view of it and think it will be unsafe for them". In their view "we need to put more work in helping people that don't usually protest understand that it's an incredibly safe and welcoming space, because we want more people to feel free and safe enough to engage in protest action".[204]

Some children stressed the importance of having access to specific information about how, where and when protests take place. For example, one 14-year-old from New Zealand who identifies as LGBTQIA+ would appreciate "making it easier to find dates, to find out ways to help. It's hard to help when I don't know where and when".[205] A 15-year-old from the USA, who identifies as a member of a racial and ethnic minority, likewise stressed the importance of "making it accessible and understandable for younger people to get involved".[206]

Accompaniment and mentorship

Being accompanied (by adults, other children, activist groups and/or organizations) is a key strategy for child activists to be able to participate and stay safe during in-person protests. In one 14-year-old male participant's experience, "it's going to be 10 times better knowing that you have somebody there next to you".[207] For a 17-year-old female participant from Korea: "Knowing the people you're going with really helps."[208]

202 17-year-old male from the Philippines, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.
203 14-year-old male from South Africa, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.
204 Questionnaire response 11 (English), 13 November 2025.
205 Questionnaire response 303 (English), 24 November 2025.
206 Questionnaire response 289 (English), 26 November 2025.
207 14-year-old male from South Africa, Spark Circle, 6 December 2025.
208 17-year-old female from South Korea, Spark Circle, 26 February 2026.

Mentorship can give children the support structures and confidence they need to protest. Some children, upon reflecting on how to improve the experiences of protesting for children and young people, suggested more organized support and accompaniment structures, involving older youth activists or adults. For example, one 24-year-old Portuguese participant, reflecting specifically on what would have helped her when she was under 18, suggested:

> "Setting up groups of young people to attend protests and marches for those who are new to this or don't feel safe going on their own. Having groups of young people accompanied by some adults would create a safe environment for those who are new and want to take part".[209]



Similarly, a 15-year-old from New Zealand proposes "a network of experienced protesters specifically for helping people at their first protest, or helping them learn ways to protest and campaign, because one of the biggest things that hold people back is not knowing how it works, or not wanting to go alone".[210]

Linked to and building further from structured accompaniment, children and young people also pointed to the role of mentorship as a key strategy to support their ability and confidence to protest. For example, one 24-year-old participant from the Netherlands reflected on her experiences as a climate protester when she was under 18 and pointed to the significance of the guidance received and lessons learned from others.[211]

Child-friendly spaces and practical support



The importance of child-friendly and safe spaces was mentioned by some children. They suggested child-specific spaces, child-friendly areas, and safe spaces where young people are actively listened to, or where children and youth activists could come together. A 17-year-old male participant from Argentina who identifies as LGBTQIA+ said: "If there were safe spaces where young activists could gather, this could significantly improve access for activists".[212] A 12-year-old male interviewee from Belgium suggested that protest organizers "make a section for the kids where they can play, a play area while they're walking... All the way at the front, or in the middle, or at the back, just for the kids to play".[213]

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209 Questionnaire response 350 (Portuguese), 4 December 2026. Originally in Portuguese: "Acho que seria útil criar grupos de jovens para ir aos protestos/marchas para quem é novo ou não se sente seguro não ir sozinhe. Eu neste momento não tenho esse problema porque já tenho 24 anos, mas quando era mais nova deparava-me muito com esse problema e os meus pais também não se sentiam seguros comigoa ir sozinha quando era nova. Ter grupos de acompanhamento de jovens, com alguns já adultos, criaria um ambiente de segurança para quem é novo e quer participar".

210 Questionnaire response 11 (English), 13 November 2025.

211 25-year-old female from the Netherlands, Spark Circle, 26 January 2026.

212 Questionnaire response 410 (Spanish), 7 January 2026. Originally in Spanish: "si hubiese espacios seguros para concentrar activistas jovenes podria mejorar considerablemente el acceso a activistas."

213 12-year-old male, Belgium, interview, 6 May 2026.

Good organization and support systems were also mentioned as being important for facilitating participation. One 16-year-old female from New Zealand spoke of the need to: "Encourage protests that are well organized and safer and at their core trying to be more joyful, especially when you're working or trying to encourage really young people to join in."[214] A 17-year-old male from the Philippines said: "It also helps when there are support systems, legal observers or community organizers, medics and people understand security culture".[215] One 16-year-old female participant from New Zealand spoke of the role of the *kaiāwhina* (helpers) who volunteer to keep protests safe.[216] She continued:

> "Obviously, police are the state, so it's harder for us to trust them to protect protesters. So we have a separate group, like *kaiāwhina*, that protects protesters. They've got green vests, walk alongside marchers, and help out at rallies. They keep an eye on things, making sure no one is harmed and that situations don't become too aggressive, especially when the police don't always act as expected."[217]

The desire for these approaches and strategies to make protest more feasible and safer for children is also shared by youth activists.

A 24-year-old female participant from the Netherlands described the importance of accompaniment: "I think it makes me feel safer, at least when I see that there are peers there as well, or when I know that friends are coming, or that my parents support the cause as well, then it just gives a sense of safety."[218] A 24-year-old from Peru who described herself as coming from a low-income household suggested that "more safe spaces should be created where young people are actively listened to – or even given a say in decision-making – so that more young people can be heard and their ideas for positive change for everyone can be valued."[219] A 21-year-old female participant from France suggested allocating more resources to training and support teams.[220]



214 16-year-old female from New Zealand, Spark Circle, 5 December.

215 17-year-old male from the Philippines, Spark Circle, 6 December.

216 For more information, see, The Spinoff, "Meet the kaiāwhina who volunteer to keep protesters safe", 17 May 2025, https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/17-05-2025/meet-the-kaiawhina-who-volunteer-to-keep-protester

217 16-year-old female, New Zealand, Spark Circle, 5 February 2026.

218 22-year-old female, the Netherlands, Spark Circle, 26 January 2026

219 Questionnaire response 483 (Spanish), 28 January 2026. Originally in Spanish: "Que se implementen más espacios seguros y de escucha activa, o hasta ya con poder de decisión, para que más nnas puedan ser escuchados y valorar su iniciativa para un mejor cambio para todos."

220 Questionnaire response 318 (French), 1 December 2025. Originally in French: "J'axerai plus de ressources sur les formations, sur des cellules d'écoutes".

Analysis

Access to information is critical for enabling children's participation in protest and civic action, helping children identify issues, understand their rights, and mobilize collectively. Research by Roger Hart emphasizes that participation without information can become tokenistic rather than genuinely empowering.[221] Furthermore, childhood participation scholar Laura Lundy argues that children's participation rights depend on four conditions: space, voice, audience and influence and that, for children to have a meaningful "voice," they need access to information that allows them to form informed opinions.[222]

The research of Sidney Verba and others for UNICEF also emphasizes the importance of recruitment networks and accompaniment, suggesting how children and young people often participate in protest because someone they trust asks, encourages or guides them. The research also highlights the importance of accompaniment by others in protests and assemblies.[223] It argues that multiple actors – including parents, caregivers, educators, child rights organizations and other supportive adults – play essential roles in facilitating children's right to peaceful assembly and protecting their safety.

This latter report also highlights the importance of safe spaces for children's rights of association, organization, collective action and participation in public life.[224] The Council of Europe's participation framework argues that children need both the right and the space to be heard in safety, and that safe, participatory spaces protect children from violence, intimidation and exclusion.[225]

In accordance with Articles 13 and 15 of the CRC, states have obligations not only to refrain from unjustifiably restricting children's rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, but also to create an enabling environment in which children can effectively exercise these rights. This includes providing or facilitating child-friendly information and education about children's rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.

What is tokenism?

Including people in a project or decision-making process without providing them with meaningful opportunities to express their views, have those views given due weight, or influence decisions affecting them.

221 Roger Hart, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, 1992.

222 Laura Lundy, "'Voice' is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child", 2007, British Educational Research Journal, Volume 33, Issue 6, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01411920701657033

223 UNICEF, *Free and Safe to Protest: Policing Assemblies Involving Children* (previously cited).

224 UNICEF, *Free and Safe to Protest: Policing Assemblies Involving Children* (previously cited).

225 Council of Europe, *Handbook on Children's Participation for Professionals Working for and with Children*, 2022.

States should also take appropriate measures to facilitate children's participation in peaceful assemblies and protect them from harm, while recognizing children as rights-holders and taking account of their age, evolving capacities and specific protection needs. These measures may include:

- Joint planning between organizers, authorities and police.



- Conducting risk assessments that specifically consider risks to children.



- Adopting policing strategies that minimize intimidation and facilitate the safe exercise of children's rights.



- Ensuring that the use of force complies with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and precaution, with particular consideration given to the rights and protection needs of children.



- Restricting or prohibiting the use of weapons, including tear gas, where their use is likely to expose children to harm.



Conclusions

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of children and young people who participate in protests, including how they understand and exercise their rights.

The findings – all of which resonate with other research and literature – reveal both the serious difficulties and barriers that child protesters face, as well as reasons to be hopeful for the future of protest and the change that children can help bring about. For each finding, the associated changes needed to create a better environment for child and youth protesters are clear. They are also linked to the obligations of states as articulated in the CRC, which has been ratified by all states except the USA, and other relevant international standards. The following Manifesto for Change spells out those key actions which children require adult decision-makers to take.



Manifesto for Change

This manifesto reflects what children and young people are calling for, based on the experiences and perspectives shared through this research. Spark Club members worked together with the project's research team to articulate these demands.

1. Listen to children and act on their demands



What children and young people are asking for is clear: to be listened to and taken seriously, and to see their ideas lead to real change.

They want:

- Their opinions, needs and demands not just heard, but respected and acted on.
- Clear and child-friendly ways to track what has been promised, so they can see what is happening and hold decision-makers accountable.
- Ongoing dialogue with adults and governments, based on respect and cooperation between generations.

Amnesty International calls on governments to comply with their obligations under Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ensuring that children can express their views freely and that these views are taken seriously in decisions that affect them.

2. Protect children participating in peaceful protests by ensuring they can participate safely



Children and young people want a future where they do not have to risk their safety to be heard.

This means:

- Ending all forms of violence, intimidation and reprisals against children exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, both online and offline.
- Child-sensitive policing that prioritizes communication and facilitation, and ensures that any use of force is lawful, necessary, proportionate and minimizes harm to children.
- Ensuring safe conditions for protest, both offline and online, including ensuring children are actively protected from any harm in the context of public assemblies, through nuanced and innovative approaches rather than unnecessary restriction of their rights.
- Ensuring that children and young people are protected from violence from the public, counter-protesters or other third parties when exercising their right to peaceful assembly.
- Establishing and/or strengthening frameworks governing the policing of protests involving children.

Amnesty International calls on governments to respect, protect and facilitate the right of children and young people to participate in peaceful protest, and to take all appropriate measures to ensure that they can exercise this right safely. These rights are recognized in the CRC and other international human rights standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),[226] and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[227]

Governments must make sure there are safe and supportive spaces where children and young people can speak out, join protests, and stand up for what they believe in, without fear or discrimination.

226 Articles 19 and 21.

227 Articles 19 and 20.

3. Remove obstacles to protest



Children emphasize that rules and regulations must support their right to protest – not block it.

They call for:

- Fewer complex procedures, such as difficult permit systems for in-person protests.
- The removal of unjustified age-based restrictions to organizing and participating in peaceful protests as well as restrictions placed on the time, place and content of assemblies.
- Children's safe participation in public assemblies to be facilitated to ensure children can join safely.

Amnesty International calls upon governments to protect civic spaces and remove barriers so that children can exercise their rights. This includes bringing domestic laws fully in line with international human rights law and standards by repealing or substantially amending provisions prohibiting or criminalizing conduct that must be protected.

4. Ensure digital safety to allow children to protest effectively online



Children want safer online spaces. They stress the need for reduced surveillance, respect for personal data, and efforts to combat online harassment.

This includes:

- Limiting the amount of personal data collected from young users.
- Ensuring that platforms are transparent about how their algorithms work.
- Taking appropriate measures to prevent children being exposed to harmful content.
- Taking active measures to detect and remove online harassment and abuse.
- Providing accessible tools that allow children and young people to report harm and receive support.[228]

Amnesty International calls on governments and technology companies to take concrete steps to protect children and young people online. This includes taking appropriate measures to address manipulative and harmful platform features and ensuring that online platforms are designed with due regard to children's rights, including their best interests, privacy, safety, freedom of expression and participation. Governments and state representatives must also refrain from unlawful surveillance, online harassment and other forms of digital targeting of child and youth human rights defenders.

228 CRC, Article 16 (right to privacy) and Article 17 (access to information and protection from harmful material).

5. Provide clear, age-appropriate guidance on how to protest peacefully, safely and meaningfully



Children are calling on governments and civil society to support access to clear, practical and age-appropriate guidance on how to take action safely.

Amnesty International calls on governments, schools and civil society to ensure that children and young people have access to education and information about their rights, including their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression. Children should have access to child-friendly information that supports them to understand and exercise these rights safely and meaningfully. States should support the development of accessible, child-friendly resources that empower children and young people to understand and exercise their rights.

Amnesty International will continue to contribute to this by producing practical tools, guides and educational resources to support youth activism and the safe and meaningful exercise of children's rights.[229]

6. Provide accompaniment and mentorship to child protesters



Children are calling on youth activists, communities and allies around the world to support them. They ask for guidance from teachers, parents and communities, support from experienced activists, and opportunities to learn from others to help them navigate different forms of protest safely and confidently.

The ability to exercise and enjoy human rights is a global issue, and it requires a global response based on solidarity across borders, communities and generations.

Amnesty International calls for civil society actors and adult allies to help equip child activists, where such support is wanted, in developing the confidence, knowledge and skills to participate in protests and exercise their rights. Such support should respect children's agency and evolving capacities.

229 See, Amnesty International Academy, https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/home

7. Listen to and support children who want to take action



Children understand that in-person and online protests are not always safe. They ask their parents and caregivers:

- To respect and listen to children's voices.
- To offer support and guidance for them to find meaningful ways for their voices to be heard, including through in-person protests.

Amnesty International, in line with Article 5 of the CRC, is calling for guidance that respects children's evolving capacities, recognizing that, as children grow, they develop increasing autonomy in the exercise of their rights, while still being entitled to appropriate protection and support.

8. Challenge negative attitudes and narratives towards children and others who protest



Children are calling on society and governments to challenge negative attitudes towards protest and to stop all stigmatizing discourse and rhetoric which fuels harmful stereotypes about peaceful protest. Such rhetoric portrays peaceful protesters in a way that is likely to foster hostility and justify punitive measures against them, and this must stop. Children have a right to speak out. Children want protest to be seen as a legitimate and healthy part of society. At the same time, they urge action to address unequal power structures, such as adult-centrism, so they can fully develop their role as active participants and defenders of their rights and future.

Amnesty International calls on governments, institutions and wider society to refrain from any vilification or harassment of child and youth protesters and to recognize peaceful protest carried out by children and young people as a legitimate, essential and protected exercise of their human rights and participation in public life.

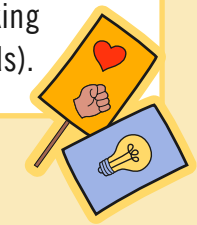
What are children calling for Amnesty International to do?

In conversation with the Spark Club, we discussed what Amnesty International and other civil society organizations could be doing to better support children in exercising their right to protest. Children highlight the need for Amnesty International to strengthen safe, meaningful and sustained engagement with child and youth activists. In particular, they recommend that Amnesty International:

Creates and supports safe spaces for children at protests (protests feel safer when Amnesty International is involved in organizing them).



Facilitate moments for children to connect before, during and after protests (for example, protest sign-making beforehand, debriefs afterwards).



Develop clear protest protocols, tips and guidance for supporting children at protests.



Offer mentorship and ongoing guidance between older and younger activists, alongside support and capacity-building from Amnesty International staff.



Create accessible resources for children and young people.



Engage children through schools.



Consistently treat children with dignity and value their voices.



Create more child-friendly spaces and structures that support meaningful participation for children.



Put in place more child and youth advisory groups in Amnesty International's national entities (as not all entities have them).



Sparking Change

Children's Right to Protest:

A Perspective from Children and Young Activists

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