



XIIIth International General Assembly
10-11 November 2022
Nouakchott, Mauritania

ADOPTED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK
2022-2026

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DCI Strategic Framework 2022-2026: A Vision and a Roadmap

Methodological note for the National Sections

The last DCI International General Assembly (IGA) adopted back in 2017 the first Strategic Framework of this kind. It presented a new strategic approach for the work of DCI from 2017 to 2021.

Indeed, the DCI grassroots Movement, that turned 40 years old during this period, decided that, without any compromise related to its origin and identity, it was necessary to adopt a strategic approach to help make our action more impactful and efficient. During this period, including during the last 2 years when the pandemic and related policies exacerbated existing inequalities and violence against children, it became clear that we need to build on and continue the roadmap initiated by the first Strategic Framework. In doing so, we strive for greater coherence, focus and enhanced cooperation to meet current and emerging challenges for the rights of the child, including through the use of regional coordination and a strong International Secretariat.

Building the Strategic Framework 2022-2026, we first of all take into account endogenous aspects of the DCI Movement: the particular priorities of different National Sections, the synergies and cross-fertilisation among the National Sections and between them and the International Secretariat, and the overall structure of our grassroots Movement, including consolidation of the DCI World Service Foundation and the consolidation of the Regional Desks. Developments external to DCI to be taken into account for the next four years include the implementation of the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty which presents an opportunity for the entire Movement associated with the NGO Panel (170 civil society organisations that supported the global study).

Another exogenous opportunity that emerged during the last years is the global movement to ensure that respect for children's rights is central to sustainable development deliberations. We already started, concretely associating justice for children with the Sustainable Development Goals in 2019, and launched the initiative "[Justice for Children, Justice for All](#)". The challenge is to achieve SDG16+, and associate children's rights concretely in the realisation of peaceful, just and inclusive societies leaving no child behind. In 2020 and 2021, DCI mobilised to [promote children's rights in the High Level Political Forum of the SDGs](#). Meanwhile, children and young people are mobilising at global level to claim their rights. They use all tools at their disposal, such as pursuing governments using the 3rd optional protocol on a communications procedure against five States. Although the admissibility of the complaint was difficult to obtain, the [UNCRC in a historic ruling](#) – the first such ruling by an international treaty body – recognised that "a sufficient causal link had been established between the harm alleged by the 16 children and the acts or omissions of the five States for the purposes of establishing jurisdiction, and that the children had sufficiently justified that the harm that they had personally suffered was significant". DCI-IS launched in 2021 a pilot initiative, mobilising young people that have participated in DCI projects and activities in their childhood. This DCI pilot activity, "DCI Youth Ambassadors" could link with similar activities from National Sections and become a way of supporting and better connecting with child and youth global mobilisation and movements.

At the same time, the new Strategy emerges while the world is slowly recovering from an unprecedented pandemic (COVID-19) where children's rights have been exposed to severe challenges. The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities for many children living in vulnerable contexts or exposed to violence; it is the case of children deprived of liberty, of indigenous children, of children on the move, of girls affected by gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM). While millions of children have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, "building back better" supposes that states understand the new challenges and are ready to invest in the future, doubling their efforts, reinforcing holistic protection systems for children's rights and mainstreaming the human rights of children in all state policies and practices¹ aiming at promoting a child-centred sustainable development.

The 2022-2026 Strategic Framework builds on the founding vision and principle of DCI as defined by past IGAs. As in the 2017 Framework, the new Strategic Framework is applicable to the entire Movement, setting high level targets and objectives, priorities and means of action. It will be complemented by regional action plans that identify specific priorities based on national/regional contexts and explore possibilities for joint actions, bearing in mind that all members of the DCI Movement are committed to work towards achieving justice for children as an overarching priority in their strategic planning. Justice for children goes far beyond child justice (i.e. children in the child justice systems) and covers all aspects of justice, including access to economic, social, cultural and climate justice.

During the first quarter of 2022, the regions will develop their regional action plans which will be adopted together with the Strategic Framework during the IGA in November 2022.

These regional action plans should be inspired by the key priorities and objectives listed in the Framework and can propose specific activities, outcomes, and indicators, ensuring better monitoring, coordination and synergies between the different regional plans and the overall Strategic Framework.

¹ In a 2021 letter sent by Child Rights Connect on behalf of its members to the UN Secretary-General, the response was positive and very clearly: "... We agree with your analysis that a holistic child rights perspective must be reinforced across the United Nations system at global, regional and local levels. ... we plan to develop a Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming through an inter-agency process..." letter of Volker Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination, 19 October 2021.

Introduction

Who we are

Defence for Children International (DCI) is a leading child-rights focused and membership-based grassroots Movement, founded in 1979, the first International Year of the Child. DCI promotes and defends children's rights at the local, national, regional and international levels. DCI was one of the drafters of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) for which it coordinated the NGO input. DCI has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, the Council of Europe, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the League for Arab States and maintains close relations with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the different UN Special Procedures mandate holders. DCI works in partnership with major human rights and child rights networks such as Child Rights Connect, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, the Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts, the Child Justice Advocacy Group, the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, and Keeping Children Safe.

With over 30 National Sections, 4 Regional Desks (Africa, Americas, Europe, MENA), an International Secretariat in Geneva and a World Service Foundation in Brussels, the International General Assembly (IGA), composed of representatives of every National Section is DCI's highest governing body. In principle, the IGA meets every four years, approves the Strategic Framework for the planning period and elects the President and the members of the International Executive Council.

Our vision

Children are a driving force for change. All children know and enjoy their rights in a just and responsible society, fully supported by adults. Children are listened to and involved in all decisions that affect them. Where there are risks of child rights violations, children are defended and empowered to claim their rights and to advocate for change. New law, policy and practice integrate child rights impact assessments. Respect for children's rights translates into a more inclusive, just and equal society.

Our challenges

The priorities of the Strategic Framework during the next four years take into account some current contextual and systemic challenges and gaps, including:

- Some states still fail to carry out a child rights impact assessment when developing new laws, policies and practices. These failures were put in stark relief during the COVID-19 pandemic when decisions affecting children failed to consider their rights and needs.
- The lack of prioritisation of an integrated child protection system in law and child justice systems, including continued scarcity and weakness of child friendly justice systems. Current child justice systems are not age appropriate, not adapted to neither focused on the needs of the child; and do not respect the right to due process...
- Safeguarding is not always embedded and implemented by institutions and activities involving children's interaction with adults.

- Inequalities, marginalisation, social exclusion leave millions of children behind, despite 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
 - The absence of concerted efforts to achieve social justice (the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society) exacerbate intergenerational inequality and marginalisation, leaving millions of children behind.
 - Mainstreaming children's rights in the realisation of the SDGs and promoting a child centred sustainable development, leaving no child behind
- Impacts of climate change, especially on children and future generations, together with the recognition of the right to a healthy environment and access to environmental justice.
- Political, economic and social problems are widely manifest with direct repercussions on children's rights: persistent violence against children in all settings, poverty, weak social and government institutions, migration, deprivation of liberty...
- Cultural challenges are still present in many parts of the world and informal justice systems and cultural and societal norms prevail over the formal legal systems in place (e.g. FGM practices officially forbidden but widely practised). Integrating child rights standards and norms with traditional systems remains a major challenge in some parts of the world.
- The prevalence of violence against children by adults, in particular those responsible for their care, has not abated. Violence is still hidden and under-reported and the rate of prosecutions and convictions remains far too low. Child abuse and violence against children increases in times of crisis, as recently witnessed during covid-19.
- 25 years after the creation of the mandate on Children and armed conflict, and the Graça Machel [report](#), impunity and lack of accountability of perpetrators of grave violations continue increasing, including in many countries where DCI is present. Recruitment and use of children in armed conflict is increasing, as well as the subsequent criminalisation and detention.

Shrinking civic space for human rights defenders

A prerequisite for addressing these challenges and opportunities, is a vibrant civil society and healthy civic space where human rights defenders can be legitimate actors for justice and advocates for change without any negative repercussions. Defence for Children International operates in an increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders, where there are backlashes against women's rights, children's rights, human rights in general and the UN system and the universality of principles of human rights are increasingly debated.

There are opportunities to partner up with and learn from other human rights movements. It is a priority to keep child rights defenders part of the DCI Movement safe and to advocate with others for an open and safe civic space. Indeed, the wider participation of children as human rights defenders in recent years has exposed them to additional challenges and threats. The DCI Movement has adopted a specific child safeguarding policy in order to protect and prevent violence against children in contact with DCI. Implementation of the policy also takes into account the safeguarding requirements of children human rights defenders in all their activities, in person or online.

Our mandate

DCI's mandate is to ensure effective implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) at the local, national and international level. DCI strives to move children's rights forward in areas where it believes that needs are not sufficiently covered by others and where the DCI Movement has an added value and expertise to be an actor for change.

DCI's strategic priorities are as follows:

- ❖ Overarching Priority
 - Justice for children

- ❖ Cross-cutting Priorities
 - Meaningful child participation and children as human rights defenders
 - Gender Equality

- ❖ Strategic Priorities
 - Children Deprived of their Liberty
 - Violence against Children
 - Children on the Move
 - Children and Armed Conflict



OVERARCHING PRIORITY: JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN



JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN

No rights without justice, no justice without rule of law and accessible, child-friendly justice systems

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DCI's approach to justice for children² covers criminal, civil and administrative justice systems and their adaptation to the needs of children. When we speak about justice, we favour a broad definition, encompassing economic, climate, social and cultural justice and access to remedies for all violations. From developing child protection systems, to preventative, rehabilitation and empowerment projects for child victims of violence, witness of crimes, suspect or prosecuted, as well as fighting against gender discrimination, empowering and supporting children as actors and advocates for their rights, DCI adopts a holistic approach to justice for children.

Justice for children is an overarching priority for DCI. The overall, long-term objective is to:

- **Promote justice in all its forms (criminal, civil and administrative as well as economic, environmental, social and cultural justice) that respects children's rights and meets their needs.**
- **Defend children's access to justice and to justice systems that respect and guarantee their rights, empower and support children to claim all their rights, and are adapted to the needs of children.**

In the context of the Strategic Framework 2022-2026 DCI will:

- Defend children's rights to justice systems that are adapted to their needs and are child-friendly. Advocate for and contribute to their establishment and/or continuous improvement in line with international standards.
- Empower and support children and child- and youth-led movements in their actions for justice and advocacy for change.
- Ensure that children and justice features as a priority item on international, regional and national agendas, involving children and actively prioritising their space in these debates.

² Through its work on justice for children over the past three decades - from the drafting of the UN Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (1985), to the follow-up to the UNCRC's General Comment No. 10 on Juvenile Justice, the leading and coordination of the campaign for the UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty (GSCDL, 2019), General Comment No 24 (2019) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, on Children's rights in the child justice systems, and the SDG 16+ Justice for Children Justice for All initiative, DCI has a proven track record as a leading NGO with experience and technical expertise in justice for children. Despite increasing national and international focus on this issue, compliance with international standards remains low. Mainstreaming proactively the protection and respect of human rights of children, as well as access to justice whenever their rights are violated, remains a huge challenge today and a priority for DCI.

- Contribute to the monitoring of the implementation of children's access to justice at the local, national, regional and global levels.
- Foster implementation of the child's right to be heard at all stages of the justice system, including in the implementation of judicial decisions.
- Defend children by advocating for, and when necessary, providing individual socio-legal support according to the DCI socio-legal defence methodology, and use strategic litigation where appropriate. Continue to strengthen the effectiveness of existing Socio-Legal Defence Centres (SLDCs) and disseminate this DCI model.
- Collect disaggregated DCI data and use them for policy briefs, advocacy, strategic litigation, and the promotion of structural reforms as needed.
- Campaign for the ratification of the 3rd Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on a Communications Procedure (OPIC) and for its implementation supporting emblematic cases of grave or systematic violations that need to be addressed through regional and international litigation.
- Mainstream UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty recommendations and support the launch of national implementation processes involving all the stakeholders concerned with the support of the NGO Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty.
- With an overall aim to radically reduce the detention of children in line with the UNCRC, promote diversion and mediation as well as non-custodial sentences and contribute to the monitoring of places where children are deprived of liberty.
- Advocate for data collection and disseminate information on the extent that children have access to remedies for violations of rights as a tool to develop relevant advocacy at the national, regional and international level.
- Raise awareness and implement capacity building programmes on child-friendly justice for children and professionals working with children, justice professionals, law enforcement officers, child protection and social workers and other stakeholders.

Strengthen Socio-Legal Defence Centres (SLDCs) as centres of excellence promoting good practice in access to justice, legal assistance and child-friendly referrals and rehabilitation services:

Socio-Legal Defence Centres (SLDCs) have been developed by DCI national sections globally in the past two decades. Currently twelve centres are run by DCI national sections worldwide. They provide direct legal and psychosocial support services to children and strengthen the capacity of community child protection referral mechanisms. These centres constitute both a substantive programme as well as a means of action adaptable to each national context. They facilitate access to justice and corresponding quality socio-legal support, including information sharing. SLDCs often reach remote groups and areas and provide first legal advice to children. Their grassroots nature also allowed them to identify and react to widespread abuses, such as child labour, children deprived of liberty, children suspected or accused of a crime, exploitation, trafficking and gender-based violence.

Thus, children in conflict with the law, unaccompanied children, child survivors of violence and witnesses, as well as adults confronted with child rights violations, can have direct access to justice and corresponding quality socio-legal support, which includes information provision, referrals to other service providers, psychosocial counselling and free-of-charge legal advice and representation – including in court. SLDCs monitor children’s rights violations to inform the Movement and implement evidence-based advocacy strategy including through informing public policy and training government representatives on children’s rights.

They contribute to reporting systems within the framework of various international human rights mechanisms that monitor the implementation of children’s rights, such as the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN Treaty Bodies, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR), UN Special Procedures and other human rights mechanisms at the regional level.

Through leading cases and landmark decisions, these grassroots interventions aim at gradually improving the overall situation of children. Building on their success and effectiveness, DCI will explore opportunities to establish new SLDCs in selected countries with peer-to-peer assistance from existing SLDCs and consolidate experience at the regional and international level, feeding directly to regional/international advocacy and strategic litigation.

Campaign for further ratification of 3rd Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on a Communications Procedure (OPIC)

The fight against injustice, impunity, and the empowerment of children becoming actors for justice and defenders of their own rights, depends also on the ratification and implementation of other existing instruments.

One crucial international human rights treaty at the global level is the **3rd Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on a Communications Procedure (OPIC)** which entered into force in 2014, and still remains the Protocol with the lowest number of ratifications¹. It allows the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) to receive individual complaints, from children directly or their representatives on behalf of them, regarding child rights violations, but also use the inquiry procedure for grave or systematic violations (art.13), a procedure that has been little used until now.

DCI will be campaigning for its wider ratification in all the countries where DCI is present. Moreover, in many of the countries where it has been already ratified, children and civil society do not know how to use this instrument.

DCI will increase awareness-raising and advocacy activities towards the ratification or the use by children of this Protocol, encourage strategic litigation for violations that find no remedy at national level, identify emblematic cases of grave or systematic violations that need to be addressed, build capacity of children and civil society on OPIC, join forces with networks, lawyers and other stakeholders preparing submission of complaints and *amicus curiae* procedures to the CRC.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE 1: CHILD PARTICIPATION



CHILD PARTICIPATION

Children as advocates for their rights, agents of change

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A rights-based, participatory decision-making with children in all domains and actions that affect them is one of the pillars of the DCI Movement. DCI considers that children are advocates for their rights, and agents of change³. Child participation consists in giving children a space, allowing them to express their voice, to the appropriate audience and ensure that their views are given due weight while also giving feedback to children about the extent of their influence.

Children's rights defenders are increasingly recognised at the UN level. In 2018, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) dedicated its Day of General Discussion to Children as Human Rights Defenders⁴. In March 2019, the UN Human Rights Council first recognised children as human rights defenders and stated that states must guarantee children a safe environment when standing up for their rights to the climate. This was followed in July 2019 by a resolution in which the UN Human Rights Council for the first time mentioned girls as human rights defenders.

The [Sustainable Development Goals \(Target 16.7\)](#) also call for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. As stated by SRSG on Violence against Children (VAC), Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid, partnerships with children will be core to delivering Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, as they inherit these challenges into adulthood.

In the COVID-19 context which has exacerbated existing inequalities and the digital gap, particular efforts should be made to include children from more marginalised backgrounds and groups⁵. In particular, DCI recognises the gender-based barriers to participation faced by girls. Through Girl Power, the Girls Advocacy Alliance and now She Leads programme⁶, DCI took active steps to promote their leadership and participation in decision making.

³ DCI's priority on child participation is underpinned by the Convention of the Rights of the Child, both Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) and Article 13 (right of every child to express his or her views, also in judicial and administrative proceedings) as well as the [Optional Protocol](#) (OPIC, 2014), which allows individual children to submit complaints regarding specific violations of their rights under the Convention and the Protocols. The rights-based approach was further specified in the nine basic requirements for child participation as set out in [general comment No. 12](#) (2009) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the right of the child to be heard and the more recent [general comment No. 25 \(2021\) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#).

⁴ <https://defenceforchildren.org/empowering-girls-as-human-rights-defenders-with-the-girls-advocacy-alliance/>

⁵ Including girls, LGBTQIs, indigenous and minorities, disabled children, child migrants and refugees, etc.

⁶ 5-year programme (2021-2025) implemented in coalition with Plan International Nederland, Terre des Hommes Nederland and DCI-ECPAT Nederland, in strategic partnership with the Dutch MFA.

The overall objective regarding child participation:

- **Defend children's rights to meaningful participation in all DCI activities, programmes and projects from the outset and advocate for their participation rights to be respected beyond DCI.**

In the context of the Strategic Framework 2022-2026 DCI will:

- Support children to draft child-led alternative reports for the UNCRC Committee and to engage with the Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review, High-Level Political Forum and regional mechanisms.
- Join forces with SRSV VAC and partners to advocate for children as drivers of change, investment in child participation and their meaningful involvement in identifying the challenges to the realisation of SDGs.
- Briefing and guiding governments and other authorities on the means to ensure child participation. Examples of DCI initiatives and action in this field are noteworthy and will be strengthened in the coming period.
- Advocate for states to ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC.
- Provide legal advice for individual cases and act collectively to bring complaints at international and regional levels.
- For their participation⁷ to be meaningful, support children, particularly their access to training on children human rights defenders' toolkits, international and regional accountability mechanisms, peer-to-peer support, child safeguarding and child-friendly versions of documents.

DCI Youth Ambassadors

In 2021, DCI-IS created a group of Youth Ambassadors, a leadership opportunity to promote youth engagement and participation, as well as to increase awareness about children's rights in their local communities. DCI will support Youth Ambassadors from various regions to become pioneers in their community, help children have a voice on the global stage, and represent the position of DCI on strategic priorities. DCI will promote mutual understanding, increase leadership skills, and prepare youth to make a difference in their communities. Through in-person or virtual exchange programmes, DCI will engage Youth Ambassadors in experiential learning activities to build their capacities; DCI will offer leadership and advocacy opportunities; and mentoring by NGO leaders. DCI will consult Youth Ambassadors on governance and safeguarding⁸ issues.

⁷ In practice, child participation means involving children meaningfully in all matters that affect their rights and well-being. This applies not only to DCI activities, but in all matters that are undertaken by local, national and international authorities and institutions.

⁸ Any involvement of children in the programme will be under the strict adherence of DCI Child Safeguarding Policy, and a general principle of protection and consent will apply to young people above 18 years old too.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE 2: GENDER EQUALITY



GENDER EQUALITY

“A seat at the table” - the importance of girl leaders

14

Girl human right defenders are central to shaping public life - through campaigns, protests and policy interventions. Across the world, girls are at the forefront of mobilising - for equality, meaningful democratic processes, their freedom to express themselves, safer spaces, and a protected environment, to name just a few. While there is stronger commitment than ever before to advance gender equality, for the global community to deliver on these commitments it must support and resource girls' rights activists, their movements and organisations.

In many countries, girls still face tremendous obstacles in realising their fundamental rights. They experience multiple forms of discrimination and violence throughout their life, starting even before birth and continuing throughout childhood and adolescence, through to adulthood.

By placing gender equality and girls' rights at the core function of its work⁹, DCI has been at the forefront of efforts to advance gender equality. National Sections and Girls Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) push authorities to take girls' rights seriously and challenge negative attitudes that condone and perpetuate gender inequality and violence. Evidence also shows that DCI played a crucial role in holding governments and parties accountable for the implementation of international and regional treaties¹⁰. DCI advocates at all levels for the rights of the girls to be fulfilled and upheld. To this end, DCI National Sections have developed programmes and projects mainstreaming a gender perspective. Most notably, DCI sections have developed programmes that fight gender-based violence (GBV) and empower girls to become advocates of their own human rights (e.g. Girl Power, Girls Advocacy Alliance, and currently the [She Leads Programme](#)¹¹ ...).

DCI respects all sexual orientations and diverse gender identities in the Movement. With a gender equality focus cross-cutting in all of DCI's work, we acknowledge and are committed to the protection and promotion of the rights of all children, with specific focus on girls and children with diverse gender identities.

⁹ DCI's Strategic Framework sets gender as a cross-cutting issue, embedding it into each of the thematic priorities. The Framework requires that a gender perspective be mainstreamed into all DCI policies and according to the principles enshrined in the UNCRC, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5). In 2015, DCI renewed our commitment to gender equality in our [Code of Ethics and Gender Policy](#) by establishing minimum standards that guide DCI as a Movement in order to ensure equal participation and access to positions and resources to women and men at all levels of the organisation and to promote gender awareness and sensitivity.

¹⁰ <https://defenceforchildren.org/sierra-leone-lifts-school-ban-on-pregnant-girls-for-post-coronavirus/>

¹¹ The She Leads programme is an initiative of Plan Nederland, Terre des Hommes Nederland and Defence for Children – ECPAT Nederland. Implemented from 2021 to 2025, the programme is being carried out through a strategic partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She Leads is committed to equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women in Africa and the Middle East. It focuses on girl activism, their leadership and participation at all levels.

The objectives regarding gender equality:

- Ensure equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women by changing social norms, policies and practices.
- Engage boys and men in achieving gender equality.

In the context of the Strategic Framework 2022-2026 DCI will:

- Empower children to become agents of change in mainstreaming gender equality in all their activities and endeavours, building a new generation of leadership.
- Conduct capacity building workshops for girl human rights defenders.
- Work for the protection and promotion of the rights of all children, with specific focus on girls and children with diverse gender identities.
- Make recommendations to multilateral bodies and governments to help realise UNCRC, CEDAW, SDG5 and SDG16 - reflecting and based on girls' lived realities.
- Uphold girls' rights through strategic litigation at the regional and/or international levels.
- Respond to the most pressing challenges girls and young women face by providing free legal aid, psychosocial support and collecting disaggregated data through Socio-Legal Defence Centres.
- Support and stand in solidarity with girls and feminist movements, support all their efforts to build momentum to advance gender equality.
- Renew calls for meaningful participation, resourcing and visibility for girls working in civil society.
- Include and mainstream the meaningful participation of girls in DCI activities, projects and events to amplify girls' voices, rather than speaking on their behalf.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY



CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

*Depriving children of their liberty is
depriving them of their childhood*

16

Following five years of advocacy and hard work, the [Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty \(GSCDL\)](#) was presented to the UN General Assembly in October 2019¹². One of the main goals was that the Study bridge the data gap on the unknown number of children deprived of liberty worldwide – this largely invisible group of children that according to the Study represents over 7 million children per year -, raise awareness of children deprived of liberty, and contribute to positive change.

The NGO Panel for the GSCDL was founded by DCI and co-chaired by DCI and Terre des Hommes.

Today the NGO Panel (170 CSOs and the DCI Movement) continues its efforts on the dissemination of the Study and the implementation of its recommendations as well as to continue gathering data on children deprived of liberty.

The GSCDL formulated specific recommendations for action at national, regional and international level to support the work of states, UN agencies, and other stakeholders to more effectively implement international standards and ensure that children deprived of their liberty actually enjoy their human rights, to reduce the number of children deprived of liberty, and to put in place effective non-custodial measures.

DCI International Secretariat will continue to lead the activities of the NGO Panel to concentrate on the adoption by the UNGA of an international follow up mechanism and continue efforts on implementation and monitoring of the recommendations of the UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty at the national, regional and international levels. In parallel, DCI will be closely involved in the implementation process of the UNCRC General Comment n°24 which contributes to raise the international standards for children involved in the justice system.

The work of implementation of the GSCDL recommendations will be critical in the coming years and for this it is crucial that DCI National Sections play a role fostering implementation in their own country together with other civil society organisations and other national stakeholders.

¹² https://childrendeprivedofliberty.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Full-Global-Study_Revised-Version.pdf

The overall, long-term objective on children deprived of liberty:

- **Defend children's right to personal liberty and seek to radically reduce the number of children deprived of their liberty, by promoting the use of diversion, mediation and the systematic use of non-custodial measures for children.**

In the context of the Strategic Framework 2022-2026 DCI will:

- Contribute to the monitoring of detention facilities.
- Ensure consultation of children and young people with lived experience of deprivation of liberty.
- Adoption of an international follow-up mechanism: advocate for a clear decision by the UN General Assembly establishing leadership within UN system for follow-up to the Global Study (by including it in the SRSG VAC mandate, the UN Task Force and the NGO Panel).
- Implementation on the national, regional and international level: to engage relevant stakeholders, including local and national governments, members of parliament and of the judiciary, to apply GSCDL recommendations to the specific context and include them into national action plans, laws and policies.
- Promotion of international/National monitoring mechanisms & data collection: Foster sustainability of the findings and recommendations of the GSCDL and consolidate evidence by contributing to set up mechanisms to monitor and collect new data on children deprived of liberty, including by collaborating with the UN Task Force on Children Deprived of Liberty chaired by the SRSG on Violence against Children.
- Giving impetus to national processes of implementation of GSCDL recommendations by working with national authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

One billion children per year experience some form of physical, sexual or emotional violence or neglect (WHO)

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Violence is a global epidemic and a daily reality for millions of children. Children of all ages, all genders, all social contexts, and all nationalities experience many forms of violence, such as physical, mental, sexual violence, torture, exploitation and online violence. Violence takes place in their homes and families, schools, institutions, workplaces and communities. The perpetrators are often those who are meant to protect children – their parents, guardians, teachers, employers, police and security forces. Some progress in the adoption of legal instruments has been achieved, yet some of the worst forms of violence remain lawful around the world and some estimates report that at least one billion children endure some kind of violence every year.

DCI has been active for more than forty years in efforts to eliminate violence against children. DCI was a major partner in the NGO collaboration for the preparation of the UN Study on Violence against Children in 2006 and its subsequent follow up.¹³ DCI was a founding member and co-chair of the International NGO Council on Violence Against Children which was published in 2016: [“10 years on: Global progress and delay in ending violence against children –The rhetoric and the reality”](#)

DCI will continue to prioritise the prevention of and responses to all forms of violence against children in all settings, particularly in the field of child justice and with a focus on gender-based violence. DCI will continue its close collaboration with the work of the SRSG on Violence against Children. Likewise, DCI is an active member of the [Child Rights Connect Working Group on Children and Violence](#). This group aims to join efforts to advocate for the elimination of violence against children with the UN human rights mechanisms and bodies in Geneva and to follow up on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Target 16.2 on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children, and Target 15.3 on eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation by 2030. DCI is also a member of the [Global Partnership to End Violence against Children](#).

¹³ Fifteen years after the completion of the UN Study and the concerted efforts and hard work across the board of UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the UN agencies and of national and international NGOs as well as of certain member states, violence against children persists on a massive scale in all settings, including where children should expect a safe environment, such as the home or the school. In 2011, the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued General Comment 13¹³ on article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, given the extent and intensity of violence exerted on children.

The overall, long-term objective on violence against children:

- **Defend children’s right to freedom from all forms of violence, help to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against children, and ensure survivors have access to justice, remedies and recovery.**

In the context of the Strategic Framework 2022-2026 DCI will:

- Empower children to claim their rights, counter gender-based violence (GBV) and to advocate for change.
- Contribute to capacity-building and advocacy for local, national and regional authorities and figureheads to implement the practical recommendations of the UN study on violence against children.
- Work to effectively implement child safeguarding and seek to empower children in contact with DCI National Sections on child safeguarding.
- Implement child safeguarding in all activities, programmes and projects and seek to build a broader child safeguarding community
- Raise awareness on hidden issues (e.g. under-reporting and impunity) in violence against children.
- Promote legislative and policy measures which ensure children have effective protection from violence as well as adequate prevention measures.
- Promote access to justice (including remedies and access to treatment) and child-friendly reporting mechanisms for children who have experienced violence.

Child Safeguarding

DCI aims to protect the children it directly or indirectly works with and continues to implement the DCI [Child Safeguarding Policy and Principles¹⁴](#), integrating it in all its projects, programmes and activities, not only for DCI actors and children involved in its operations, but DCI will also seek to ensure broader child safeguarding implementation for all relevant stakeholders at the national and regional level. DCI launched this Policy in 2020. It sets out obligations and principles at international level, for the Movement as a whole, and enumerates clear responsibilities for National Sections and the International Secretariat, to ensure that DCI staff, operations and programmes do no harm to children, that they do not expose children to the risk of harm and abuse, and that any concerns the organisation has about children’s safety within the communities in which they work, are reported to the appropriate authorities.

- **Further develop a child safeguarding culture and expertise within the DCI Movement, mainstreaming throughout our actions and activities as well as those of partners and counterparts.**

¹⁴ This document is complemented by the individual child safeguarding policies of the National Sections and of the International Secretariat. Risk Assessments are conducted before each activity and this builds capacities of DCI’s National Sections.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: CHILDREN ON THE MOVE



CHILDREN ON THE MOVE¹⁵

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DCI advocates at the international and local level for the implementation of the UNCRC, raising awareness on the rights of children on the move, particularly those travelling unaccompanied or without documents, and advocating for their rights to be recognised and respected. Up to 50 million children are forcibly displaced around the world today, yet they are not sufficiently protected.

The socioeconomic impact of conflicts and the pandemic on children will push many more into precarious living conditions that could force or shape their decision to migrate. Children on the move face many potential dangers, such as violence, including institutional violence by state actors or agents, abuse, exploitation, discrimination, separation from their families, trafficking, smuggling and military recruitment. Children on the move face variable challenges specific to their individual circumstances and their (perceived) status, and DCI aims at ensuring that all children on the move benefit from appropriate protection measures and can claim their rights.

While the contexts leading to children being on the move vary greatly, DCI adopts throughout its work with children on the move the philosophy that they should be first and foremost treated as children, and as individual rights holders who are entitled to the full realisation of their rights. Our approach is grounded in children's rights, including that of the right to non-discrimination aimed at the removal of the structural barriers that exclude children on the move from the full realisation of their rights, especially in accessing services such as legal assistance, access to justice, access to education, family reunification procedures and protection from all forms of violence.¹⁶ DCI will continue to promote an intersectional and multistakeholder approach when addressing children on the move, which includes: transnational child protection mechanisms, and robust challenges to the dehumanisation and criminalisation of children on the move.

Of particular concern is the continued and widespread practice of depriving children of their liberty due to their own or their parents' migratory status, either in *de jure* or *de facto* detention settings. It has been proven that such deprivation of liberty has long term negative consequences for a child's physical and psychological health, thus can never be in the best interests of the child¹⁷, and does not fall under the application of article 37 of the UNCRC.

¹⁵ Children on the move comprise child migrants, child refugees, children seeking asylum, internally displaced children, child survivors of trafficking and stateless children.

¹⁶ See <https://defenceforchildren.org/dci-guinea-liberia-and-sierra-leone-cooperate-to-end-cross-border-child-trafficking-in-the-mru-countries-in-west-africa/>

¹⁷ UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty, 2019. Also see Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration.

The overall, long-term objective on children on the move:

- **Defend children on the move, who face variable challenges specific to their individual circumstances and their (perceived) status, to help ensure that they benefit from appropriate protection measures, and are empowered to claim all their rights.**

In the context of the Strategic Framework 2022-2026 DCI will:

- Promote the effective and meaningful participation of children on the move in all decisions affecting them and promoting their empowerment so that they can be actors of change.
- Advocate for the prohibition of all forms of detention due to the migratory status of a child or of their parents, in line with the recommendations of the GSCDL and the CRC General Comments, as well as monitoring places where children are deprived of liberty in selected countries.
- Use strategic litigation to provide direct, specialist legal representation to children on the move in asylum and immigration matters.
- Provide direct socio-legal support for children on the move and facilitate family reunification, asylum procedures and access to justice in general.
- Pay particular attention to children on the move who may be at an increased risk of discrimination and/or violence due to intersectionality (e.g. girls, unaccompanied children, children with disabilities, stateless children, ...).
- Host awareness raising and capacity building programmes for children and professionals working with children, migration and law enforcement officers, social workers and other stakeholders in selected countries.
- Contribute to the development and implementation of migration-specific protective mechanisms, such as guardianship, community-based integration, ...
- Advocate for a child rights approach to UN bodies as they address issues affecting children on the move, as well as the continued participation in international migration-related networks.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT



CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

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Twenty-five years after the presentation of the [UN Study on children and armed conflict](#)¹⁸, 20 years after the entry into force of the [Second Optional protocol of the UNCRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict](#), this is still a main area of priority for DCI because of the massive and grave violations against children that take place worldwide. The Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty estimated that every year at least 35,000 children are deprived of liberty in the context of armed conflicts.

DCI is the chair of the Child Rights Connect on Children and armed conflict which links directly with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as of the Group of Friends in Geneva and New York. DCI conducts regular advocacy to the United Nations Secretary-General to publish a complete list of perpetrators of grave violations in his annual report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict. In 2019, DCI joined [Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict](#) in order to improve the link with the Security Council Working Group and the annual report process (Resolution 1612 of 2005).¹⁹

DCI has been active in the debates regarding the ways and means to improve the mandate of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on children and armed conflict. In this context, DCI has also been involved in the report for the 25th anniversary of the mandate coordinated by the OSRSG, in particular providing opportunities for children themselves to contribute their lived experiences and recommendations in the [Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021](#)²⁰. Finally, DCI pays particular attention to gendered child rights violations in situations of armed conflict, when sexual and/or gender-based violence is used as a weapon of war.

¹⁸ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/1996/08/1996-graca-machel-report-impact-armed-conflict-children/>

¹⁹ Reacting to the 2021 annual report of the Secretary-General, a group of internationally respected experts on children and armed conflict released a [statement](#) expressing their deep disappointment at continued omissions from the perpetrators list, particularly of government forces. The same experts previously undertook an independent review of the listing and de-listing decisions between 2010 and 2020 – publishing the findings of their analysis in a March 2021 report, [Keeping the Promise: An Independent Review of the UN's Annual List of Perpetrators of Grave Violations against Children, 2010-2020](#)

²⁰ “Child voices” including recommendations from children from Palestine, Yemen, Central African Republic (workshops organised by respective DCI National Sections) as well as other children and youth on the move who have experienced armed conflict in their country of origin (with the support of DCI-Greece). DCI is publishing the full report of the child voices from these countries <https://defenceforchildren.org/new-report-children-in-war-2022-defence-for-children-international/>

The overall objective regarding children and armed conflict:

- **Defend children's rights not to be recruited or used in hostilities, and, where they are, to secure their rehabilitation and reintegration into society, especially with a view to being actors of change and peacebuilding during and after conflict.**

In the context of the Strategic Framework 2022-2026 DCI will:

- Enhance Socio-Legal Defence Centres (SLDCs) to respond to the immediate needs of children in armed conflict in selected countries, promoting the rights of child victims of recruitment, as well as working on prevention from all grave violations in the context of armed conflict, ending their criminalisation, promoting their rehabilitation/reintegration, preventing and ending their detention.
- Advocate for rehabilitation and reintegration in communities of children associated with armed forces in selected countries.
- Work on children's empowerment as peace-building actors in war-torn societies.
- Promote the role of children in the context of peace processes negotiations and implementation (following examples in Sierra Leone and Colombia) and also international recommendations.
- Fighting against the impunity in the case of grave violations and ensure all perpetrators are treated according to international law.
- Promote evidence-based reporting of armed conflict situations impacting children, and work towards the improvement of international monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms, including the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and UN human rights mechanisms (Human Rights Council, International Commissions of Inquiry, Special Procedures...).
- Promote initiatives and campaigns to ensure that the views of children from countries in armed conflict are heard and taken into account at the national, regional and international level.