



ACERWC
African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child

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The Charter @35: “*Reflect, renew, recommit*”

Concept Note

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I. Background

1. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the Charter/ ACRWC), was adopted on 11 July 1990 and came into force on 29 November 1999. The adoption of the Charter enhances child protection by addressing key issues unique to the African context while complementing broader international child rights frameworks, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It explicitly prohibits child marriage, requiring states to legislate a minimum marriage age of 18 years, and completely outlaws the recruitment of child soldiers, ensuring stronger safeguards for children in conflict situations. The Charter also extends protection to internally displaced children, acknowledging the unique vulnerabilities of those affected by war, natural disasters, and instability. Recognizing the challenges faced by the girl child, the Charter explicitly condemns harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), and ensures that girls who become pregnant before completing their education have the right to continue schooling. Additionally, it considers socio-economic realities, emphasizing non-custodial sentencing for mothers with young children, and prioritizing the child's well-being in judicial decisions. By incorporating these regional-specific protections while aligning with the universal principles of children's rights, the Charter serves as a crucial and complementary instrument in advancing child protection across Africa.
2. After 35 years of its adoption, 51 Member States to the African Union (AU) have ratified the Charter, with four yet to ratify, namely the Kingdom of Morocco, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of South Sudan, and the Republic of Tunisia. Among the Member States that have ratified the Charter, three have made reservations on specific provisions, namely the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.
3. The ACRWC establishes a treaty body, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the Committee/ACERWC), which is tasked with the promotion and protection of children's rights across Africa. The Committee's mandate is to oversee and monitor the effective implementation of the provisions enshrined in the Charter by AU Member States, ensuring that legislative, policy and other measures at the national level align with the principles of child rights as outlined in the Charter. To fulfil this mandate, the ACERWC carries out a range of core functions, including the consideration of State Party reports, the consideration of Communications against State Parties on alleged violations of children's rights, interpretation of the provisions of the Charter, and advocacy and engagement with stakeholders. Through these mechanisms, the ACERWC plays a critical role in holding African governments accountable for their commitments to child rights, ensuring that the promises made under the Charter translate into meaningful action that improves the lives and well-being of children across the continent.
4. In its engagements with State Parties through its various initiatives, the Committee notes the progress made in the implementation of the Charter. Many Member States have undertaken significant legal reforms to align their domestic legislation with the Charter's provisions, resulting in more robust frameworks for child protection. This alignment has led to the establishment of child-friendly policies and institutions, contributing to improved welfare and rights for children. In assessing the first phase of Agenda 2040 implementation (2016-2020), the ACERWC

identified notable achievements. Several countries have made significant strides in areas such as birth registration, access to quality education, and healthcare services for children. The Committee notes that these advancements are a direct result of concerted efforts by Member States to prioritize children's rights in their national agendas.

5. Despite significant progress in advancing children's rights under the Charter, several challenges persist, and new threats continue to emerge. One key concern is the gaps in implementation, as some State Parties have yet to ratify the Charter, while others have placed reservations that weaken its impact. Additionally, delayed, infrequent, or non-reporting by some countries limits the ability of the Committee to effectively monitor compliance and hold governments accountable. Many children still lack access to basic social services, especially in rural areas, while harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM continue to violate their rights. Children with disabilities face discrimination, child labour and trafficking remain widespread, and the sexual exploitation of children, both offline and online, continues to rise. Low birth registration rates leave many children without legal identity, preventing them from accessing education and healthcare. The situation of children without parental care and those living on the streets remains critical, as these children are at heightened risk of violence, neglect, and exploitation.
6. Beyond these long-standing child rights challenges, emerging threats require urgent action. Climate change is displacing families and increasing food insecurity. The digital age has introduced risks like cyberbullying, online exploitation, and unequal access to digital learning. Urbanization has deepened inequalities, especially for children in informal settlements. The impact of business practices including child labor and unethical marketing is a growing concern. Ongoing armed conflict, recruitment of children, school attacks, and forced displacement continue to endanger children. Rising migration, radicalization, and shrinking space for child participation further exacerbate risks. As the ACRWC marks 35 years, the Committee calls for stronger commitments from State Parties, civil society, and all stakeholders to take concrete steps in ensuring the full protection and realization of children's rights across the continent.
7. In commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the ACRWC, the ACERWC will undertake a series of activities leading up to the main event and continuing through December 2025 to reinforce the visibility, impact, and implementation of the Charter across Africa.

II. Objectives

8. The main objective of the commemoration is to assess the status of implementation of the Charter over the past 35 years. The specific objectives of the commemoration are to:
 - a. Identify the challenges and success of the endeavours employed to promote and protect the rights of the child in Africa.
 - b. Examine emerging issues including climate change, digitalization, urbanization, business impacts, and conflict and their implication on children's rights.

- c. Identify emerging child rights priorities which could guide future efforts to promote and protect the rights and welfare of children in Africa.

III. Key Elements of implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

9. Effective implementation of the Charter requires State Parties to adopt holistic and systemic approaches. Drawing on the Committee's General Comment on Article 1, various elements are critical for the realization of children's rights across the continent. This includes aligning national laws and policies with the Charter, developing well-resourced national child rights strategies, and establishing strong child protection systems that respond to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Adequate budget allocation, disaggregated data collection, and the existence of high-level coordinating bodies are also critical to ensuring accountability and effective service delivery for children.
10. In addition, independent monitoring through institutions like National Human Rights Institutions and Children's Commissioners should be strengthened to uphold children's rights. The participation of children and civil society must be institutionalized, ensuring children's voices are heard and respected in decision-making processes. States should also prioritize the dissemination of the Charter and provide regular training for professionals working with children. Lastly, timely and transparent follow-up on recommendations from the Committee, including Concluding Observations and mission reports, is essential to demonstrate commitment and drive progress.
11. The realization of the ACRWC requires more than formal ratification; it demands deliberate, sustained, and well-coordinated action by State Parties and all relevant stakeholders. By aligning legal frameworks, investing in child protection systems, and institutionalizing meaningful child participation, African States can build resilient environments where all children thrive.
12. Against the backdrop of the 35th anniversary of the adoption of the Charter, it is imperative to reflect on the progress made, renew our commitment to addressing persistent and emerging challenges, and recommit to a future where every child enjoys their full rights and potential under the Charter.

IV. Activities to be undertaken by the ACERWC to commemorate the Charter @35

13. To maximize the impact of the commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the ACRWC, the Committee will undertake a series of activities to reinforce advocacy, strengthen commitments, and engage various stakeholders in ensuring the continued implementation of children's rights across Africa. The activities include awareness campaigns, commemorative publications, and research.
14. A major event marking the commemoration will be a two-day **Continental Child Rights Symposium** which will be held on **27-28 November 2025** during the 46th Ordinary Session of the Committee. The symposium will bring together children, Member States, representatives of AU organs, NHRIs,

CSOs, and other stakeholders to reflect on various themes related to the rights enshrined in the Charter. In a child-friendly and participatory setting, children will engage in discussions, share their experiences, and draft the Charter @ 35 Declaration, outlining their priorities and recommendations. Outcomes of the symposium will be compiled into a comprehensive compendium to support future advocacy and action on children's rights.

V. Recommendations for Member States

15. As part of the 35th anniversary commemoration of the Charter, the Committee encourages Member States to actively participate in the Continental Child Rights Symposium, scheduled for 27–28 November 2025. The symposium will provide a unique platform for Member States to engage directly with children, civil society, and other stakeholders, reflect on progress made under the Charter, and contribute to shaping future priorities for the advancement of children's rights in Africa.
16. In addition to participating in the symposium, Member States are encouraged to take concrete and sustained measures to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Charter beyond the commemorative events. While notable progress has been made in promoting children's rights over the past 35 years, persistent gaps and emerging challenges demand renewed commitment and action from governments to protect and promote the rights of every child on the continent.
17. To this end, the Committee encourages Member States of the African Union to take the following measures as part of the commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the Charter:
 - a. ***Assess the implementation of the Charter:*** Member States should conduct a comprehensive review of the status of implementation of the Charter to identify progress, gaps and challenges.
 - b. ***Harmonize national laws with the Charter:*** Member States should align laws and policies with the Charter and ensure child protection systems are functional and well resourced.
 - c. ***Ratify the Charter and withdraw reservations:*** Member States that have not ratified the Charter should take urgent steps toward ratification whilst those that have made reservations should withdraw the reservations.
 - d. ***Ensure functional child protection institutions:*** Member States should strengthen or establish institutions responsible for child welfare with adequate capacity and coordination.
 - e. ***Implement ACERWC Recommendations:*** Member States should take concrete steps to implement the Committee's recommendations from decisions on communications, concluding observations and recommendations, mission reports, resolutions among other documents.
 - f. ***Increase budget allocations for child rights:*** Member States should secure sustainable funding for child rights related sectors and children's rights initiatives.
 - g. ***Develop Action Plans to address key child rights challenges and emerging issues:*** Member States should implement national action

plans and strategies to address both long-standing and emerging child rights concerns.

- h. *Strengthen child participation in decision-making*: Member States should establish formal and meaningful mechanisms that allow children to express their views and influence policies affecting their rights.
- i. *Mainstream child rights into development agendas*: Member States should ensure that child rights are integrated into national and regional development policies, using child-sensitive approaches.
- j. *Strengthen collaboration with stakeholders*: Member States should foster multi-sectoral partnerships with AU bodies, UN agencies, CSOs, the media, religious and traditional leaders, and the private sector to advance child rights protection and advocacy.
- k. *Promote public awareness and advocacy on child rights*: Member States should launch awareness campaigns at the national and community levels to increase legal literacy, shift harmful social norms, and mobilize public support for children's rights.

18. The ACERWC encourages Member States to use this 35th anniversary as a catalyst for renewed action, ensuring that commitments made under the Charter lead to tangible improvements in the lives of children across Africa. To support and inspire national-level commemorations, the Committee has provided practical guidance on suggested activities for Member States in **Annexure A** of this Concept Note.

VI. Monitoring the celebration and implementation of the recommendations by Member States

19. To commemorate the 35th anniversary of the Charter, the Committee encourages Member States to organize national-level activities, drawing from the suggestions in Annexure A. These celebrations provide an opportunity to raise awareness, engage stakeholders, and reaffirm commitments to children's rights. The Committee invites States to share highlights or notable achievements from their commemorations, which may be featured in the official Charter @ 35 publication. This will allow for broader visibility of national efforts and contribute to collective reflection on the progress and challenges in implementing the Charter across the continent.

ANNEXURE A: Guidelines for commemorating the Charter @ 35 Anniversary by Member States

In recognition of the 35th anniversary of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Member States are encouraged to organize national-level activities that promote visibility, reflection, and recommitment to children's rights. Below are suggested activities that can be adapted to national contexts:

i. National Commemoration Events

- Host a national commemoration involving children, government officials, parliamentarians, civil society, media, and the private sector.

ii. Conferences and Policy Dialogues

- Organize national conferences seminars, or high-level dialogues to assess the status of child rights implementation.
- Facilitate multi-stakeholder policy discussions on emerging issues including climate change, digital safety, and urbanization affecting children.

iii. Workshops and Training Sessions

- Conduct capacity-building workshops for child protection officers, teachers, health workers, and law enforcement on the provisions of the Charter.
- Train children on their rights and how to participate in national decision-making processes.

iv. Children's Participation Platforms

- Organize child-led forums to give children a platform to express their views and present recommendations on the implementation of the Charter at national level.
- Support children to draft a Charter @35 national statement or declaration reflecting their priorities.

v. Public Awareness Campaigns

- Launch media and social media campaigns to promote child rights and raise awareness of the Charter.
- Disseminate child-friendly versions of the Charter in local languages.

vi. Research and Documentation

- Document case studies or success stories from communities where child rights have been effectively promoted.
- Submit case studies and reports to the ACERWC, which may be included in the Committee's official Charter @35 publications to showcase good practices and lessons learned from across the continent. These should be submitted to the ACERWC Secretariat by **September 2025**.