



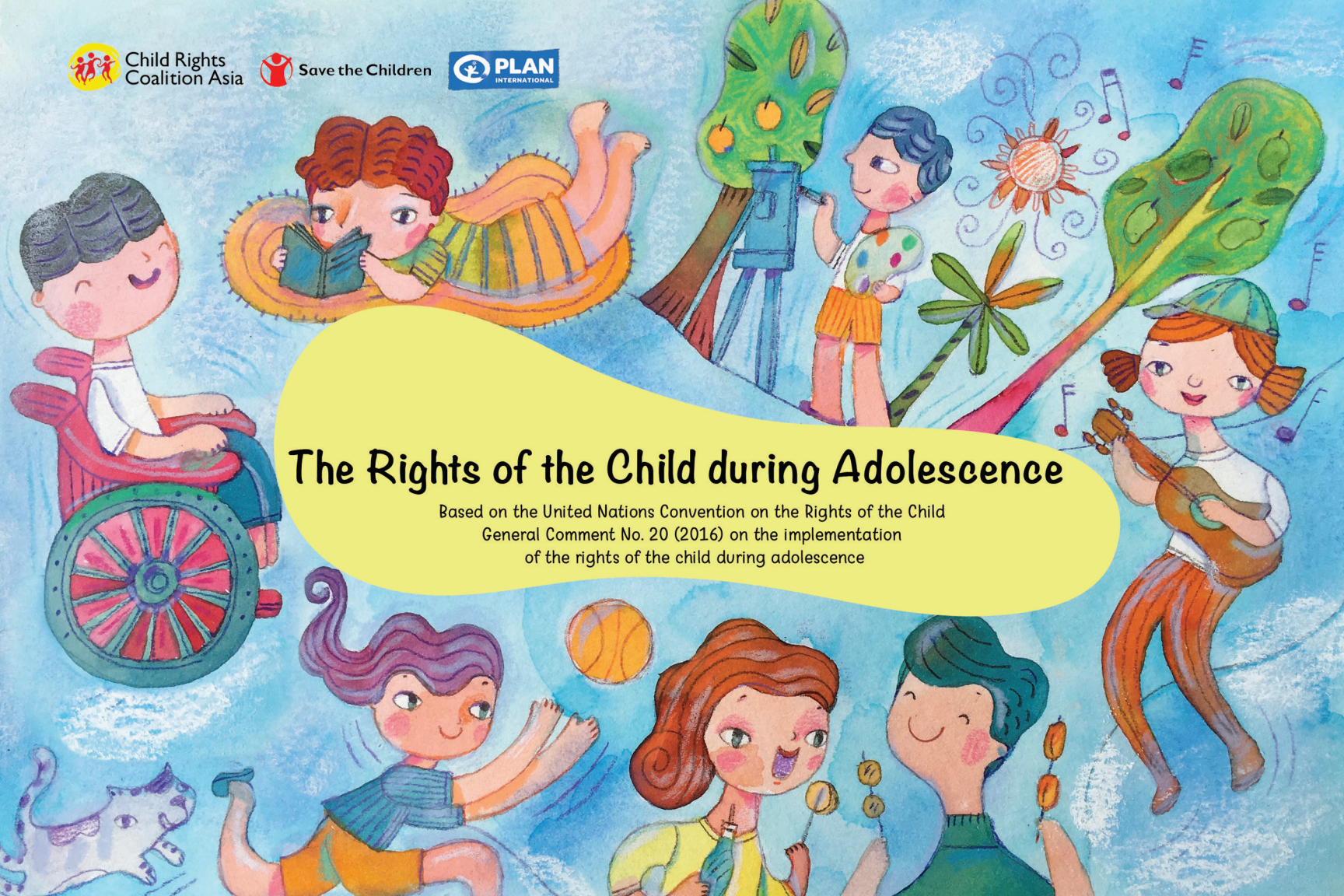
Child Rights
Coalition Asia



Save the Children

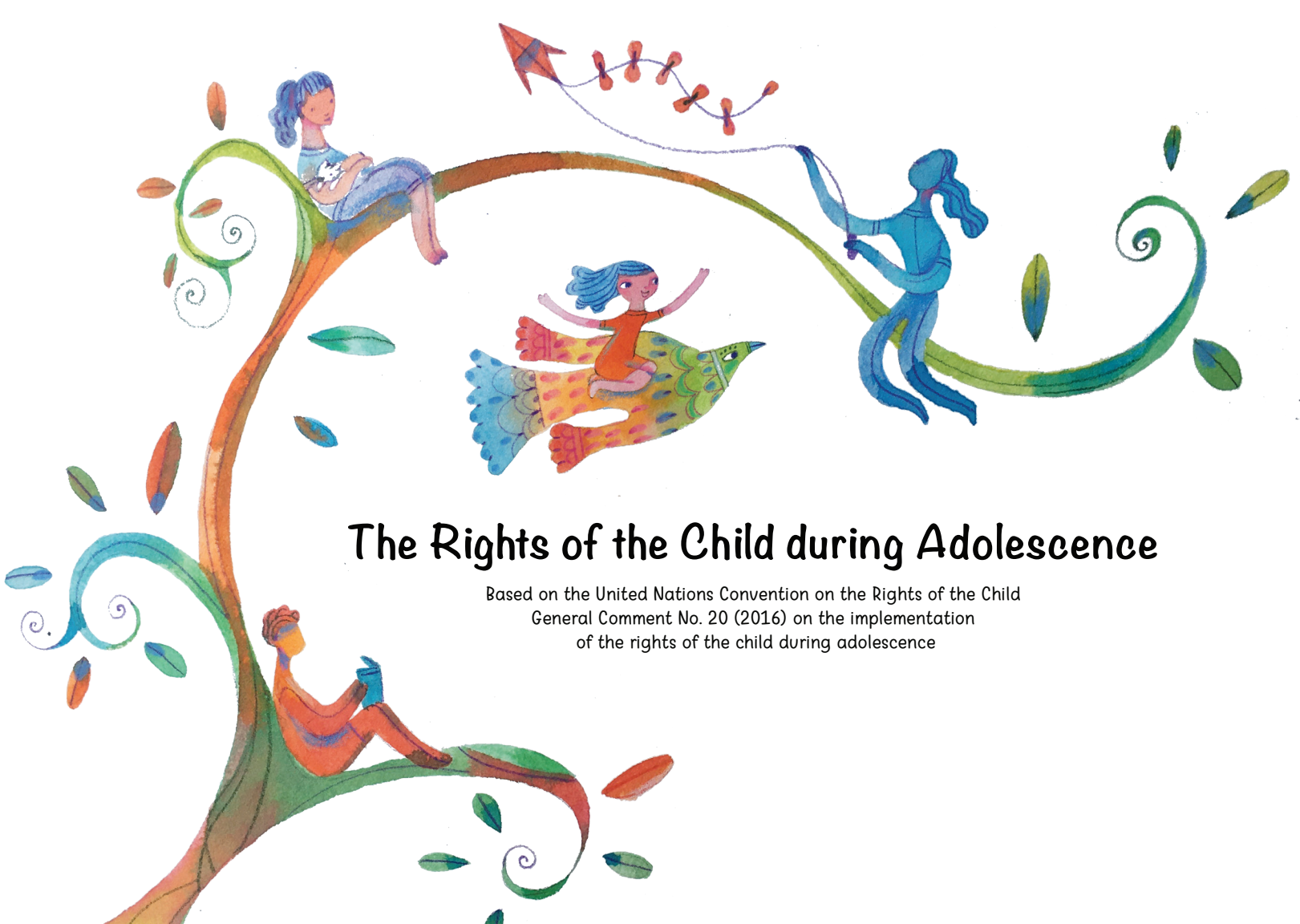


PLAN
INTERNATIONAL



The Rights of the Child during Adolescence

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
General Comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation
of the rights of the child during adolescence



The Rights of the Child during Adolescence

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
General Comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation
of the rights of the child during adolescence

An original publication of Child Rights Coalition Asia (CRC Asia)
Copyright 2021

Produced thanks to the financial support of Save the Children Philippines and Plan International Asia Pacific

Child Rights Coalition Asia (CRC Asia)
Unit 13 Block 5 Romarosa Townhomes
Luzon Avenue, Barangay Matandang Balara
Quezon City, Metro Manila
Philippines 1119
www.crcasia.org

Writers: Magnolia Eva Jacinto-Escobedo and Hazelyn Joy Bitaña

Artwork: Beth Parrocha

Layout: Beth Parrocha and Serah Mae Antonio

Photocopies and reproductions of excerpts are allowed with proper credits.

Printed on recycled paper using soy ink







What is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) is a legally binding agreement that sets out the rights of all children. It incorporates the full range of children's human rights, including their civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights.

To date, the UN CRC remains the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. By ratifying the UN CRC, governments or States Parties agree that children are not just passive recipients of charity but are individuals with a distinct set of rights and responsibilities appropriate to their age and stage of development.

What is the Committee on the Rights of the Child?

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) is a group of experts selected by States Parties around the world to ensure that States Parties are carrying out their obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of children. The CRC Committee reviews the progress reports of States Parties, taking into consideration the perspectives of other parties, including national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, and children.

As part of its work, the CRC Committee holds a public event called the Day of General Discussion to discuss a specific issue related to children's rights. The CRC Committee also writes General Comments intended for use of governments, civil society organizations, academics, children, and other actors.

What is a UN CRC General Comment?

A General Comment is the CRC Committee's authoritative interpretation of the articles and provisions of the UN CRC. It helps the State Parties in implementing the UN CRC and, consequently, in preparing their report to the CRC Committee.

The General Comments are based on the CRC Committee's experiences in monitoring the reports and the systematic violations, misunderstood provisions, or emerging issues relevant to child rights. The General Comments also reinforce the links between the UN CRC and other human rights bodies. In some countries, members of the judiciary use the General Comments to interpret the UN CRC.

In developing the General Comments, the CRC Committee, especially in recent years, strives to get the inputs from experts, States Parties, civil society organizations, academics, children, and other concerned stakeholders.



What is UN CRC General Comment No.20?

The CRC Committee published General Comment No. 20 (GC 20) in December 2016 because of the observation that the potential of the adolescents are compromised due to the lack of recognition or investment of States Parties to respect, promote, and fulfill the rights of adolescents. Generic policies designed for children and young people often fail to address the diversity of situations and backgrounds of adolescents.

“[General Comment No. 20] highlights the importance of human rights-based approach that includes recognition and respect for the dignity and agency and adolescents; their empowerment, citizenship and active participation in their own lives; the promotion of optimum health, well-being and development; and a commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of their rights, without discrimination.”

-UN CRC GC 20, paragraph 4

GC 20 aims to:

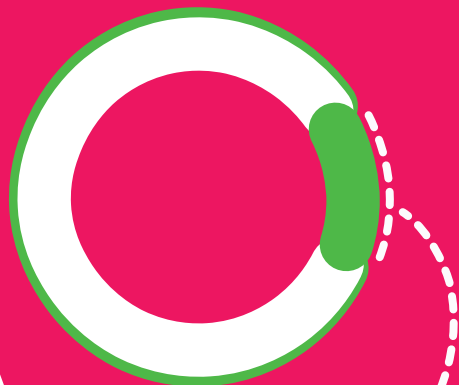
1. Provide States with guidance on the legislation, policies, and services needed to promote comprehensive adolescent development consistent with the realization of their rights
2. Raise awareness of the opportunities afforded by and challenges faced during adolescence
3. Enhance understanding of and respect for the evolving capacities of adolescents and the implications for the realization of their rights
4. Strengthen the case for greater visibility and awareness of adolescents and investment to enable them to realize their rights throughout their lives

Who are the Adolescents?

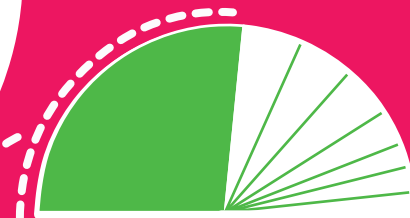
Adolescence is not easily defined. Individual children mature at different times and at varying rates. They reach puberty at different ages and their brain functions do not mature at the same time. Also, individual children have different backgrounds and live in different situations, environments, and culture, and all these could influence a child's rate of maturity.

Taking these into consideration, GC 20 does not define adolescence by setting the age limits, but it recognizes that this crucial period of transition from childhood to adulthood has specific needs and implementation of rights.

To facilitate consistency in data collection, however, GC 20 focuses on the period between 10 years old until the 18th birthday.



Around 1.2 billion or 16% of the world's population are adolescents



More than half of the world's adolescents are in Asia

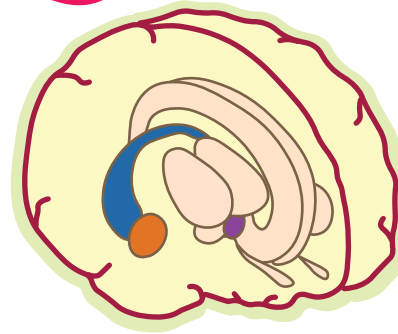
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1; Adolescent is defined as 10-19 years old.

Parts of the Brain

The **Limbic System** (or the emotional part of the brain) matures earlier than the **Prefrontal Cortex** (or the rational part of the brain). This means that the teenage brain processes information with the emotional part of the brain, while the adult brain processes information with the rational part of the brain.

Limbic System:

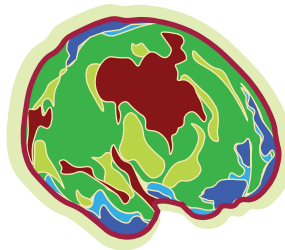
Amygdala, **Hippocampus**, and **hypothalamus** – the seat of emotions like fear and anger, and feelings of pleasure.



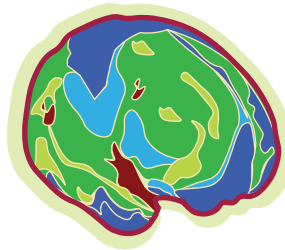
Prefrontal Cortex

– in charge of making good decisions and reasoning that are based on processed information. This part of the brain fully matures and develops way beyond adolescent period.

Less Matured



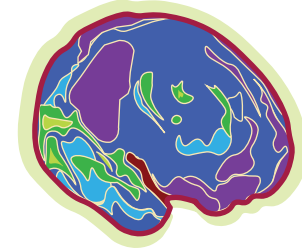
5-yr-old brain



Preteen brain



Teen brain



20-year-old brain

Fully Matured

Source: Cogtay, N., Giedd, J. N., Lusk, L., Hayashi, K. M., Greenstein, D., Vaituzis, A. C., Nugent, T. F., 3rd, Herman, D. H., Clasen, L. S., Toga, A. W., Rapoport, J. L., & Thompson, P. M. (2004). Dynamic mapping of human cortical development during childhood through early adulthood. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 101(21), 8174–8179.

New studies show that the brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex, continues to develop at age 30 years old up to late 40s¹. Brain is not fully mature until 30s and 40s.

The brain during adolescence period is actively maturing and the on-going brain development are influenced by heredity; environment; sex hormones; physical, mental, economical, psychological status; surgical interventions during early childhood; sleep patterns; nutritional status; pre and postnatal injury; pharmacotherapy; drug abuse (nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, etc); and age.²

¹ Dumontheil, I., Hassan, B., Gilbert, S., & Blakemore, S.-J. (2010). Development of the selection and manipulation of self-generated thoughts in adolescence. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 30 (22), 76664-7671.

² Arain, M., Haque, M., Johal, L., Mathur, P., Nel, W., Rais, A., Sandhu, R., & Sharma, S. (2013). Maturation of the adolescent brain. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*. 9:449-461.



Why Focus on Adolescents?

“Adolescents are agents of change and a key asset and resource with the potential to contribute positively to their families, communities and countries.”

-UN CRC GC 20, paragraph 2

Adolescence is a critical stage in life that is characterized by growing opportunities and significant vulnerabilities.

Children Begin to Explore and Build Their Identities During Adolescence

At this stage in life, children begin to create their sense of self based on their interactions with their family and cultural history, and, significantly, with the digital environment. They begin to express who they are and who they want to be through the

Adolescents are on a Rapid Curve of Development

Children undergo significant development changes during adolescence. They experience rapid brain development and their physical body changes at the onset of puberty. Their cognitive abilities are improving and their sexual awareness is developing. They discover new abilities, strengths, and skills. At this stage, they also experience greater expectations from society and they begin to have more significant peer relationships as they transition to becoming more independent.

language they use, the arts they create and support, the music they listen to, the clothes they wear, and even the peers or friends they choose to be with. This construction and expression of identity is particularly complex for adolescents as they create a pathway between minority and mainstream culture.

Adolescence is Part of the Life Course

Each period of childhood – from infancy to childhood to adolescence – has an impact on the children's optimum development. Adolescence is a valuable period of childhood and it is also a critical period of transition. Positive results from investments and interventions during infancy and childhood may be wasted if the period of adolescence will be overlooked. Alternatively, the adverse effects of harm inflicted during early childhood can be offset during adolescence when given the right attention and positive and supportive reinforcements.

Adolescence is a Period of Health Risks

Although not exclusive to this age group, adolescents face health risks related to preventable causes such as childbirth, unsafe abortions, road traffic accidents, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, inter-personal injuries, mental ill health, and suicide.

Adolescents Face a Challenging Environment

Entering into adolescence can mean becoming more aware about the different points of view and experiences within the society, especially because of the increased interaction with the online world. Along with this, adolescents become exposed to several risks related to violence and abuse, sexual or economic exploitation, trafficking, migration, and radicalization or recruitment into gangs and militias. They also become exposed to local and global challenges regarding the pressure to perform well in school, discrimination, poverty, inequality, urbanization, migration, and peace, among others. In addition, the adolescents today will experience and bear the worst effects of climate change.

As such, adolescents need the education and support to face the challenging and changing social, economic, and digital environments. They need help in developing their understanding, tolerance, and capacity for coexistence and in addressing the societal factors that lead to their exclusion and marginalization.

The Second Window of Opportunity

Adolescence is a crucial period of transition. It can be a time for vulnerability when negative experiences during this time – such as exposure to violence, introduction to substance abuse, being subjected to bullying, developing mental health problems, or facing unwanted pregnancy – can have long-term effects. On the other hand, it can be a time to develop positive and lifelong impacts on children. In fact, adolescence is considered as the second window of opportunity to influence the development of a child.

The earliest years of childhood is already widely recognized as the first window of opportunity or the period when a child's brain develop at a rate that can never be repeated but can be influenced through nutrition, stimulation, and protection from violence and other harms. Recently, scientific evidences show that children's brains undergo a rapid curve of development during adolescence. Throughout adolescence, the brain is highly flexible and adaptable to changes. During adolescence, mental health problems and suicidal tendencies sharply increase. Substance abuse, behaviors that can lead to sexually transmitted diseases, and other risky and negative behaviors are also activated during this period. These can be intensified by experiences of bullying, interpersonal violence, and exclusion and by growing up in stressful environments, such as those characterized by armed conflict, violence, and extreme poverty. Nonetheless, if adolescents receive the proper support and learning, their tendencies for risky and negative behavior can be shifted to positive direction. Building resiliency, healthy patterns of behavior, and social and emotional learning during this period can help children move towards a positive direction and the results can remain until adulthood.

In addition, the period of adolescence provides opportunities not only to build on the successes by the interventions during early childhood, but also to counteract the negative impacts or traumas during childhood. Having positive experiences and safe and secure environments during adolescence can offset the effects of childhood trauma.

Source: Balvin, N. & Banti, P. (2017). *The Adolescent Brain: A second window of opportunity - A compendium, Miscellanea*. UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti: Florence



What to Remember in Upholding the Rights of Adolescents?

GC 20 highlights that this period of transition from childhood to adulthood presents an opportunity to improve life chances. It brings attention to the need to promote the enjoyment of the rights of adolescents, strengthen their potential in contributing positively to society, and overcome the challenges they face in an increasingly globalized and complex world.

Use a Positive and Holistic Approach

Upholding the rights of adolescents requires an approach that builds on their strengths and contributions, while addressing the barriers for them to expand their capacities and to contribute to their individual development and to the development of society.

Negative labels for adolescents do not facilitate or support the development of their physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive, cultural, and economic capacities. These negative

labels lead to narrow problem-focused interventions and take away the focus on actions that create a safe and healthy environment for adolescents to develop.

Adolescents need an environment that recognizes their value. They need an environment that helps them thrive, explore their identities and opportunities, and balance risk and safety. They should have support to build their resiliency and their capacity to make free, informed, and positive decisions and life choices. They need help to successfully navigate the transition into adulthood.



To Build Resiliency and Have
a Healthy Development,
Adolescents Need:

Strong relationships with and support from the key adults in their lives

Opportunities for participation and decision-making

Problem-solving and coping skills

Safe and healthy local environments

Respect for individuality

Opportunities for building and sustaining friendships





Understand and Respect Their Evolving Capacities

The concept of evolving capacities refer to the “process of maturation and learning whereby children progressively acquire knowledge, competencies and understanding, including acquiring understanding about their rights and about how they can best be realized.”¹ This means that as adolescents gain more knowledge and improve their skills, their need for direction and guidance decreases, and their capacity to make decisions and take responsibility for these decisions increases.

As such, taking into consideration their evolving capacities, adolescents should be part of identifying risks, as well as in developing, implementing, and evaluating decisions and actions that affect them. Doing so will contribute to their own protection and to the development of their capacities as they transition to adulthood.

Treat Them Without Discrimination

Adolescents experience discrimination on the basis of being an adolescent. They are being described as dangerous or hostile and, at the same time, treated as incompetent and not capable of making their own decisions. This negative characterization of adolescents result to ill-treatment, loss of opportunities, and violation of their rights.

In this regard, actions should be done to ensure that the rights of all adolescent boys, adolescent girls, and other adolescents are respected and protected. Also, there should be efforts to remove the conditions that result to direct and indirect discrimination of adolescents.

1 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2006). General Comment No. 7 (2005): implementing child rights in early childhood, para. 17





Take Their Best Interests as the Primary Consideration

The best interest of the adolescents should be the primary consideration in all actions concerning them. These actions may be in the form of legislation, policies, economic and social planning, and decision-making and budgetary decisions. Also, adolescents should be able to participate in the process of determining their best interests.

Guarantee Their Right to be Heard and to Participate

Adolescents have the right to express views on all matters that affect them, whether these matters are about their education, health, sexuality, family life, or access to justice, among others. In accordance with their age and maturity, the views of adolescents must be given due weight when making decisions and actions. For instance, adolescents should be able to share their opinions and have their recommendations taken seriously when developing,

implementing, and monitoring relevant legislations policies, programs, projects, and services that concern them. Online tools and platforms may be used to strengthen and enhance their participation.

The adolescents' right to participate includes the right to political and civil participation. Adolescents must be supported to have increased opportunities for political participation and to form or be part of a group or organization. Doing these will help them develop their active citizenship, connect with peers, and improve their understanding and confidence in making informed decisions.

In addition, adolescents who are exercising their right to be heard must be able to submit complaints if their rights were violated. They should be able to seek remedies through safe and accessible means. Parents, caregivers, policymakers, decision-makers, and professionals working for and with children must also have the understanding and capacity to support the adolescents' right to be heard and to participate.



Adolescents participate in various aspects of society. They take part in education campaigns, environmental advocacies, creative arts, peer support programs, community development projects, health programs, human rights initiatives, participatory budgeting, and political engagements. They are also at the cutting edge in terms of social media and digital environment.



What Do We Need to Uphold the Rights of Adolescents?

Comprehensive and multisectoral national strategies that have a dedicated focus on adolescents to address the root causes of child rights violations and ensure a coordinated approach across government ministries, bodies, or units

Monitoring of implementation of legislations, policies, and services that affect the realization of rights of adolescents

Collection of data, disaggregated by age, sex, disability, ethnicity and socioeconomic condition, and common indicators to monitor the progress in the implementation of adolescents' rights

Accessible information about children's rights disseminated through the school curriculum, the traditional and digital media, and public information materials, with particular effort to reach adolescents in marginalized situations

Training on the rights of the child for all professionals working with and for adolescents, with a focus on building the professionals' skills and competencies in understanding and respecting the evolving capacities of adolescents

Budgetary commitments that are transparent – with publicly accessible information and with space for civil society and child participation – and are observing the principles of sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency, and equality

The Rights of the Child During Adolescence

Through GC 20, the CRC Committee provides guidance on upholding the UN CRC during the period of adolescence.

Civil Rights and Freedoms

Birth Registration

Adolescents who have not been registered at birth or were not registered immediately must be provided with free late birth certificates and civil registration.

Adolescents who do not have birth certificates can face several complications. For instance, they will not be able to access basic services, prove their nationality, get identification documents, use the child safeguards in the justice and immigration systems, or be protected from exploitation, trafficking, or recruitment to armed forces.

Freedom of Expression

Adolescents have the right to seek, receive, and communicate information and ideas. They have the right to express and share their views through spoken, written, and sign language. They can also do this through non-verbal means, such as images, art, music, clothing, and personal style. They can use books, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, banners, and digital and audio-visual media.



Freedom of Religion

As their capacities evolve, adolescents gain a more active role in making decisions, including decisions about their choice of religion and forms of worship. Their freedom of religion must be respected by their parents, schools, and other institutions. They should be given the choice regarding attendance to religious instruction classes and they should be protected against discrimination on the grounds of their religious beliefs.

Freedom of Association

Adolescents need and want to spend more time with their peers, and this has its benefits. Aside from resulting to social connections, this helps them develop the capacities that they would need in the future to have successful relationships, employment, and community participation. For instance, they learn about emotional literacy, conflict resolution, being part of a group, intimacy, and trust.

Thus, the value of association with peers should be recognized by parents, teachers, school officials, community leaders, policymakers, and other actors. The adolescents' freedom of association and peaceful assembly should be respected. Adolescents should be legally allowed to join clubs, form their own online networks, or take part in political collective actions, among others. Along with this, adolescent human rights defenders, including adolescent girls, should be protected against threats and violence.

Privacy and Confidentiality

There should be a dialogue with adolescents to identify violations of adolescents' right to privacy and confidentiality, and there should be measures to strengthen the protection of this right.

Violations of adolescents' right to privacy and confidentiality can be related to personal correspondences and communication, confidential medical advice, personal engagements in the digital environment, access to personal records, and use of personal data by commercial companies. Children in institutions and children involved in criminal proceedings experience different forms of privacy violations too.

Right to Information

The ability to access relevant information can have a significant positive impact on equality, and media has an important role in communicating these information. Thus, adolescents need access to all forms of media, but particular attention should be given to online media, especially with the increasing interactions of adolescents with the digital environment.

Although the digital environment may expose adolescents to certain risks, this should not result to restrictions to adolescents' access to online media. Instead, holistic strategies should be done to keep adolescents safe in the digital environment. Legislations should address online harms, parents and professionals should be trained, and businesses should implement a child rights approach in their work. Also, children should be capacitated to develop their digital citizenship. This can be done by incorporating digital literacy in the basic education curriculum and by promoting accessible formats for all adolescents, including adolescents with disabilities. Adolescents should also be actively involved in designing and implementing initiatives that involve their online safety.

Protection from All Forms of Violence

Adolescents have the right to be protected from all forms of violence and harmful practices, including child marriage and corporal punishment in all settings. As part of implementing comprehensive legislative, administrative, social, and education measures to end violence against children, adolescents should be involved in the development of prevention strategies, rehabilitation programs, protective responses to victims of violence, and social reintegration programs of adolescent victims.



Family Environment and Alternative Care

Support for Parents and Caregivers

Throughout adolescence, parents and caregivers continue to play an important role in providing security, emotional stability, encouragement, and protection to children. Nonetheless, parents and caregivers must respect the rights and evolving capacities of adolescents. In family settings, tolerating unequal power relations or violence in the name of traditional values prevents the enjoyment of rights of adolescents.

Moreover, there should be an understanding that the condition or situation that parents and caregivers grew up in may be different from the current condition or situation that adolescents are living in, especially because of the digital technological advancements and globalization. In consequence, parents and caregivers might have difficulty in effectively communicating with and providing guidance to adolescents. As such, parents and caregivers also need guidance, assistance, training, and support to address the generation gap.





Adolescents in Alternative Care

There should be stronger commitments and investments to support adolescents in alternative care, and to ensure that institutionalization is only taken as a measure of last resort. Adolescents, who are commonly asked to leave alternative care once they reach 16 to 18 years old, require assistance before, during, and after their transition. They need support in building their independence and capacity to address their vulnerabilities before leaving alternative care. As they transition, they also need help in securing employment, housing, psychological support, and other after-care services.

Adolescent-Headed Families

There is a growing number of adolescents who are serving as the primary caregivers of their families, either because they have become parents themselves or their parents have died, disappeared, or are absent. This group of adolescents need help in fulfilling their responsibilities towards the children they are responsible for. They might need material assistance and social protection interventions, as well as educational assistance to develop their basic knowledge on child health, nutrition, and breastfeeding. Moreover, adolescent caregivers need extra support so that they can still enjoy their rights to education, play, and participation.

Basic Health and Welfare



Health Care

Comprehensive health policies, programs, and public health strategies should take into account the nature and extent of adolescent health problems and the barriers that adolescents face when accessing services, which are rarely designed for their needs. For instance, adolescents experience legal and financial challenges, discrimination, confidentiality violations, disrespect, violence, stigma, and judgmental attitude from healthcare personnel whom they asked for help.

One of the health problems faced by adolescents is related to their mental health and psychosocial well-being. Problems such as suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, and depression may arise due to a number of factors, including genetics, biological makeup, personality, and external environment or experiences. To protect them from mental health problems, adolescents need support to build their resiliency and have healthy development. Moreover, in responding to the mental health needs of adolescents, the approach should be based on public health and psychosocial support, rather than overmedicalization and institutionalization.

Adolescents also face barriers in the realization of their sexual and reproductive health rights. They need access to free, confidential, adolescent-responsive, and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health information, commodities, and services. Requirements for third-party or parent's consent to access these should be removed. Stigma and fear – experienced, for example, by adolescent girls, girls with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex adolescents – should be addressed. Abortion should be decriminalized to ensure that girls have access to safe abortion and post-abortion services.

In addition, adolescents in school and out-of-school should get and be part of the development of age-appropriate, comprehensive, inclusive, and mandatory sexual and reproductive health education that is based on scientific evidence and human rights standards. They need to know about gender equality, sexual diversity, sexual and reproductive health and rights, responsible parenthood, sexual behavior and violence prevention, and prevention of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

HIV/AIDS

The need for parent's consent, disclosure issues, and on-going stigma are some of the challenges faced by adolescents when accessing antiretroviral therapy and remaining in treatment. To address these challenges, there should be a consideration of the different realities and situations of adolescents when developing and implementing HIV prevention and treatment programs. Health services offered to adolescents should include HIV-related information and services. Adolescents should have access to confidential HIV testing, treatment, and counselling services. They should be attended by trained personnel who fully respect their right to privacy and non-discrimination. Moreover, governments should consider reviewing HIV-specific legislation that criminalizes the unintentional transmission of HIV and the non-disclosure of one's HIV status.



Drug Use among Adolescents

Because of their vulnerable situation, adolescents in street situations, those excluded from school, those with histories of trauma, those who experienced family breakdown or abuse, and those living in families coping with drug dependence are more at risk of drug-related harm. Also, individuals who started drug use during adolescence are more likely to become dependent to it.

In this regard, adolescents should get accurate, objective, and scientifically-supported information that aims to prevent and minimize harm from substance abuse. Also, actions should be done to ensure the protection of adolescents against illicit use of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, tobacco, alcohol, and solvents. There should be prevention, harm-reduction, and dependence treatment services available to adolescents, without discrimination and with sufficient budgetary allocation. In addition, drug control policies that do not involve punishment of adolescents should be preferred.



Injuries and a Safe Environment

Injuries due to violence and unintended injuries – from road traffic crashes, drowning, burns, falls, and poisoning – are a leading cause of death and disability among adolescents. As such, there is a need to have laws requiring the use of protective equipment and policies related to driving while intoxicated and licensing. There should be programs on education, skills development, and behavior change. Care and rehabilitation services for those who suffer injuries should also be provided.

Adequate Standard of Living

Poverty can lead to extreme stress, insecurity, and social and political exclusion. Adolescents wanting to get out of poverty are compelled to drop out of school, be involved in child or forced marriage, become members of a gang, be recruited into militias, be recruited to migrate, or become involved in sexual exploitation, trafficking, hazardous or exploitative work or work that interferes with their education.

To prevent this, there should be available social protection that provide adolescents and their families with basic income security, protection against economic shocks and prolonged economic crises, and access to social services.



Education, Leisure, and Cultural Activities



Education

A universal, quality, and inclusive education and training is the single most important policy investment that ensures immediate and long-term development of adolescents. However, a growing number of boys are not enrolling and are not remaining in school. There are also challenges in keeping girls in school beyond primary education. To address these, positive gender relations and social norms should be promoted. Sexual and gender-based violence should be addressed. Positive role models, family support, and economic empowerment of women should be mainstreamed. Also, the reasons of boys for leaving school should be researched and addressed.

Furthermore, proactive measures should be done to ensure that the adolescents in marginalized situations – such as adolescents living in poverty; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex adolescents; adolescents belonging to minorities; adolescents with psychosocial, sensory, or physical disabilities; adolescents who are migrating; adolescents in situations of armed conflict or natural disasters; adolescents in street situations; or adolescents who are working – have the opportunity to continue to secondary education. Efforts should be made to improve school enrollment and attendance and to address the factors that cause children to leave school early even while still illiterate and without obtaining qualifications. There should also be opportunities for those who have left to complete their education.

In addition, the curricula for secondary education should lead to the empowerment of adolescents. It should prepare them for their active participation, develop their respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, promote their civic engagement, and prepare them to lead responsible lives in a free society.



Transition from Education to Training and / or Decent Work

Significant numbers of adolescents are not in education, training, or employment, leading to unemployment, underemployment, and exploitation as they move towards adulthood. This situation reflects the need for support to out-of-school adolescents in getting decent work as they enter adulthood, and the need for educational and vocational information and guidance to adolescents. It also shows that formal and informal education and training should be designed to develop the skills required in the modern labor market.

Leisure, Recreation, and the Arts

The adolescents' right to rest and leisure, and to engage and participate freely in play, recreational, and artistic activities, whether online and offline, are fundamental to their development. However, these rights are widely neglected during adolescence, especially for girls. There is a need to address the negative attitude towards adolescents in public spaces and the lack of adolescent-friendly urban planning, educational, and leisure infrastructure.





Special Protection Measures

Migration

Adolescents migrate, either within or outside their country of origin, because they want to seek better standards of living, improve their education, or be reunited with their family. However, many adolescent migrants are denied access to education, housing, health, recreation, participation, protection, and social security. Even in places where there are laws to protect their rights to services, adolescents gaining access to services face challenges related to the demands for identity documents or social security numbers, harmful and inaccurate procedures to determine their age, financial limitations, and language barriers. In some cases, gaining access to these services can result to their detention or deportation.

As such, there should be age-appropriate and gender-sensitive legislation upholding the rights of adolescent migrants. Additional safeguards should also be given to unaccompanied and separated refugee and asylum-seeking adolescents. They should not be subjected to expedited removal and should not be returned or refused entry before a determination of their best interests has been made and a need for international protection has been established. Furthermore, there is a need to address the factors that drive adolescents to migrate, and also put attention to the rights violations faced by adolescents left behind when parents migrate.



Trafficking

Data collection on the sale of, trafficking in, and abduction of children should be comprehensive and systematic. The data should be disaggregated, paying particular attention to children living in the most vulnerable situations. Also, investments should be made in the rehabilitation and reintegration services, as well as in the psychosocial support for child victims.

Attention should be given to the role of gender when looking at the vulnerability and exploitation of adolescents. Moreover, parents and children should be informed, either through offline and online means, about the dangers of domestic and international trafficking.

Conflict and Crisis

Situations of armed conflict and humanitarian disasters force adolescents, who may even be displaced, to take on adult responsibilities. These events can also expose them to risks of violence, remove their access to service, and deny them from enjoying their rights. For these reasons, humanitarian programs should address the specific needs and rights of adolescents. Also, emergency preparedness programs and post-conflict efforts should be seen and used as an opportunity for adolescents to contribute to the economic and social development, resilience-building, and peace-building.



Recruitment into Armed Forces and Groups

Adolescent boys and girls should not be recruited, offline or online, by government armed forces and by armed groups and militias. They should not be used in all hostilities, as well as in peace negotiations with armed groups. They should also be protected against being targets of terrorist propaganda and extremist views.

As a strategy to protect children from being involved in armed conflicts, the factors that cause adolescents to take part in these activities should be understood and addressed. In addition, recovery and gender-sensitive reintegration programs and services should be provided to adolescents who are recruited into armed forces and groups, including those in migration situations.

Adolescents are also recruited into gangs, which often provide social support, a source of livelihood, protection, and a sense of identity in the absence of other opportunities. However, gang membership creates a climate of fear, insecurity, threat, and violence, which become a major factor contributing to adolescent migration. To address this, the focus should be on developing comprehensive public policies that address the root causes of violence and gangs, instead of implementing aggressive law enforcement approaches. Investment is needed in prevention activities for at-risk adolescents; interventions that encourage adolescents to leave gangs; the rehabilitation and reintegration of gang members; restorative justice; and the creation of municipal alliances against crime and violence, with an emphasis on the school, the family, and social inclusion measures. There should also be due consideration to adolescents who are forced to leave their country for reasons related to gang violence and may need refugee status.

Child Labor

All adolescents have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and the worst forms of child labor. Action against child labor should include comprehensive measures, including school-to-work transitions, social and economic development, poverty eradication programs, and universal and free access to quality and inclusive primary and secondary education.

Nonetheless, adolescents have the right to perform light work under appropriate conditions, provided that they already reach the national legal minimum working age that is aligned with international standards and with compulsory education. There should also be due respect to their right to education and right to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life, and the arts.

Introduction to age-appropriate forms of work plays an important developmental role in the lives of adolescents, equipping them with skills and enabling them to learn responsibilities. Yet, there should be a transitional approach towards achieving a balance between the positive role of work in adolescents' lives while ensuring their right to compulsory education, without discrimination. Schooling and the introduction to decent work should be coordinated to facilitate both in the lives of adolescents.

Justice for Adolescents

Adolescents may come into contact with justice systems as children in conflict with the law, as victims, or as witnesses. As such, measures are needed to reduce their vulnerability both as victims or witnesses and as perpetrators of crimes.

For children in conflict with the law, there should be comprehensive child justice policies that emphasize restorative justice, diversion from judicial proceedings, alternative measures to detention, and preventive interventions. Actions and decisions should aim to tackle the social factors and root causes. The focus should be on rehabilitation and reintegration, including for those adolescents involved in activities categorized as terrorism. In addition, detention should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. Adolescents should be detained separately from adults, and all children under the age of 18 should not be subjected to death penalty and life imprisonment. Lastly, the age of criminal majority at 18 years should be maintained, and if the minimum age of criminal responsibility is already higher than the international standard, it should not be lowered but should be progressively raised to 18 years.

Adolescents Requiring Particular Attention

Specific groups of adolescents may be subjected to discrimination and social exclusion.

Exposure to any form of violence affects the development of adolescents, especially among the following specific groups:

Girls

During adolescence, gender inequalities become more significant. Manifestations of discrimination, inequality, and stereotyping against girls often intensify. These result to girls being subjected to early pregnancy, child marriage, female genital mutilation, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and trafficking.

There is a need to promote the empowerment of girls, challenge patriarchal and other harmful gender norms and stereotyping, and conduct legal reforms in order to address direct and indirect discrimination against girls.

Boys

Traditional concepts of masculinity and gender norms linked to violence and dominance can negatively affect the rights of boys. They are exposed to gangs, coercion into militia, extremist groups and trafficking, and harmful initiation rites. They are not recognized to be vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse and exploitation, denying them of information and services that attend to their needs.

As such, efforts are necessary to challenge negative perceptions of boys, promote positive masculinities, overcome cultural values based on machismo, and promote greater recognition of the gender dimension of the abuses they experience. There should also be a recognition that engaging with boys and men, as well as girls and women, contribute to achieving gender equality.



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Adolescents

This group of adolescents experience being humiliated, belittled, bullied, discriminated, and denied access to education and justice. They are also subjected to rape and sexual assault. These experiences have been linked to low self-esteem, depression, suicide, and homelessness.

Adolescents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex need respect to their freedom of expression, gender identity, and emerging autonomy. They should not be subjected to “treatments” to try to change sexual orientation. Laws criminalizing or discriminating against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status should be repealed, and laws prohibiting such discrimination should be adopted.

Adolescents with Disabilities

Adolescents with disabilities face widespread prejudice, exclusion, social isolation, and discrimination. They do not get the same opportunities available to other adolescents. Some are denied access to education, justice, and sexual and reproductive health information and services. They are barred from participating in rites of passage and are vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, as well as child or forced marriage.

There is a need to have measures to overcome these barriers, guarantee equal respect for the rights of adolescents with disabilities, promote their full inclusion, and facilitate effective transitions from adolescence to adulthood.





Minority and Indigenous Adolescents

Due to insufficient respect for cultures and values of minority and indigenous groups, adolescents belonging to these group experience discrimination, social exclusion, marginalization and non-inclusion in public space. These make the vulnerable to poverty, social injustice, mental health issues, poor educational outcomes, and detention within the criminal justice system.

Adolescents from minority and indigenous communities should be supported so that they are able to enjoy their cultural identities, and build on the strengths of their cultures to become active contributors to family and community life.

References

Arain, M., Haque, M., Johal, L., Mathur, P., Nel, W., Rais, A., Sandhu, R., & Sharma, S. (2013). Maturation of the adolescent brain. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*. 9:449-461. doi:10.2147/NDT.S39776

Balvin, N. & Banati, P. (2017). *The Adolescent Brain: A second window of opportunity - A compendium, Miscellanea*. UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti: Florence

Dumontheil, I., Hassan, B., Gilbert, S., & Blakemore, S-J. (2010). Development of the selection and manipulation of self-generated thoughts in adolescence. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 30 (22), 7664-7671. doi:10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1375-10.2010

UNCHR. (n.d.). General comment No. 20 On the Implementation of the Rights of the Child During Adolescence . Retrieved from https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fGC%2f20&Lang=en

UNICEF. (n.d.). Adolescent Development. Retrieved November 2, 2019, from [unicef.org: https://www.unicef.org/adolescence](https://www.unicef.org/adolescence)

United Nations Children's Fund. (2017). *The Adolescent Brain: A second window of opportunity*. 22-23.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2006). General comment No. 7 (2005): Implementing child rights in early childhood. UN Doc CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2016). General comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence. UN Doc CRC/C/GC/20

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition*. Rev. 1.

