

International Democracy Hub – Stakeholder Report

I. Background

1. This report was prepared by the International Democracy Hub (IDH), for the 4th Universal Periodic Review of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is a summary of the information collected by IDH since the 3rd Universal Periodic Review.

II. Information Provided by the International Democracy Hub

A. Scope of International Obligations & Cooperation with International Human Rights Mechanisms and Bodies

2. IDH recommends that the DPRK ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict: Take the necessary steps to formally adopt and implement the Optional Protocol, ensuring that children within the country's jurisdiction are protected from recruitment and involvement in armed conflict, and seek guidance from international bodies like UNICEF for assistance in the process.²

3. IDH recommends that the DPRK seek technical support from entities such as UNICEF for implementing child protection measures: Actively reach out to organizations such as UNICEF to access their expertise, resources, and technical assistance in developing and implementing effective child protection measures, including preventing child labor, trafficking, and abuse.

4. In 2019 UPR report, the DPRK reported that it has adopted the Regulations on Schools for the Blind and Deaf to provide relevant legal and institutional grounds. However, there are only 11 special schools for children with visual and hearing disabilities across North Korea, showing that the situation of special education for children with disabilities is poor in North Korea. Incorporate principles of the CRPD and the CRC into domestic legislation to protect persons with disabilities and children: Amend existing laws or enact new legislation to align with the principles and provisions of the CRPD and the CRC, ensuring that the rights and interests of persons with disabilities and children are legally recognized and upheld within the country's legal framework.

5. IDH recommends that the DPRK strengthen border controls to prevent trafficking of children: Implement robust border controls and law enforcement measures to prevent the

trafficking of children across national borders, protecting vulnerable children from exploitation and abuse.

6. The DPRK has the Civil Registration Law with poor contents, and children are not properly registered at birth. The birth registration system has to be improved to ensure that all children are registered at birth, prevent statelessness, and guarantee citizenship status, and access to essential services for all children. IDH recommends that the DPRK improve birth registration system to prevent statelessness among children: Enhance birth registration system to ensure that every child is registered at birth, preventing statelessness, and guaranteeing their right to citizenship, identity, and access to essential services.

7. North Korea's Child Rights Protection Law aims to contribute to the maximum guarantee of children's rights and interests in all areas, but the human rights of North Korean children are not guaranteed. IDH recommends that the DPRK engage with international organizations and donors to support child protection initiatives: Collaborate with international organizations and donors to secure funding, technical assistance, and expertise for child protection initiatives, strengthening national efforts to safeguard children's rights and promote their well-being through global partnerships.

B. National Human Rights Framework

8. IDH recommends that the DPRK enhance measures to make essential services accessible to all, especially women, children, and persons with disabilities: Take proactive measures to improve the accessibility and availability of essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare, ensuring that the vulnerable groups like women, children, and persons with disabilities have equal access to these services.

9. IDH also recommends that the DPRK strengthen programs for vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly: Develop and expand social welfare programs, healthcare services, and support networks specifically tailored to address the needs and vulnerabilities of marginalized groups within society, ensuring their well-being and inclusion.

10. IDH recommends that the DPRK allocate resources for the implementation of child protection laws: Dedicate sufficient financial resources and support for the effective implementation of child protection laws and policies, including funding for support services, rehabilitation programs, and capacity-building initiatives.

11. Despite North Korea's Child Care Law adopted at the 6th meeting of the 14th term of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) in February 2022, North Korean children's human rights are not guaranteed. IDH recommends that the DPRK establish mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing child protection measures: Create independent monitoring mechanisms tasked with overseeing the implementation of child protection laws and policies, holding accountable those who fail to comply and ensuring continuous improvement in child protection efforts.

12. The North Korean education system is designed around a "revolutionary ideal" aimed at cultivating an informed generation. This includes teaching Juche ideology, labor party policies, revolutionary traditions, communist beliefs, and fostering revolutionary optimism. IDH recommends that the DPRK ensure access to education for all children: Guarantee that every child, irrespective of their socio-economic background or geographical location, has unrestricted access to quality education, including children with disabilities, refugees, and internally displaced persons.

13. IDH recommends the DPRK to strengthen child protection measures to cover all individuals under 18: Enhance existing child protection laws and policies to encompass comprehensive protection for all individuals under the age of 18, ensuring their safety, well-being, and rights are safeguarded.

14. DPRK's family law has been continuously supplemented or revised, but no updates have been made since 2009. IDH recommends that the DPRK promote positive parenting practices and provide support for vulnerable families: Offer guidance and resources to parents and caregivers on positive parenting techniques and provide support services for vulnerable families, including parenting classes, counseling, and social assistance, to strengthen family cohesion and promote children's well-being.

15. IDH also recommends that the DPRK regularly review and update child protection policies and legislation to address emerging challenges and needs: Conduct regular reviews and updates of child protection policies and legislation to adapt to evolving challenges, emerging trends, and new research findings, ensuring that national frameworks remain effective, relevant, and responsive to children's rights and needs.

C. Implementation of International Human Rights Obligations

a. Child Protection

16. IDH recommends that the DPRK develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent and combat violence against children: Create a comprehensive national strategy that encompasses preventive measures, intervention strategies, and victim support services aimed at addressing all forms of violence against children, with a focus on identifying and addressing the root causes of such violence.

17. Ensure access to healthcare, counseling, and psychosocial support for child victims: Guarantee access to healthcare services, counseling, and psychosocial support for child victims of abuse and exploitation, addressing their immediate and long-term physical and mental health needs.

18. Protect children from all forms of forced labor as defined by the UNCRC: Enact and enforce legislation that explicitly prohibits all forms of forced labor, including trafficking, debt bondage, and hazardous work, and implement measures to effectively prevent and respond to cases of child exploitation and abuse in all its forms.

19. Prevent militarization and recruitment of children into armed forces: Implement measures to prevent the recruitment and deployment of children in armed conflicts, including by armed forces, armed groups, and other non-state actors, ensuring that children are protected from the physical and psychological harms associated with military involvement.

20. Develop child-friendly reporting mechanisms for cases of abuse and exploitation: Establish easily accessible and child-friendly reporting mechanisms, including hotlines, helplines, and online platforms, to encourage children to report cases of abuse and exploitation confidentially and safely.

21. Provide legal aid and support services for child victims of abuse and exploitation: Ensure that child victims of abuse and exploitation have access to legal aid, counseling, psychosocial support, and other necessary services to aid in their recovery, rehabilitation, and pursuit of justice.

22. Children residing in prison camps, orphanages and relief shelters also engage in forced child labor. Establish shelters and rehabilitation programs for child victims of abuse and exploitation: Create safe shelters and comprehensive rehabilitation programs specifically tailored to the needs of child victims of abuse and exploitation, providing them with the necessary care, protection, and support for their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

23. Strengthen child protection policies in institutions such as orphanages and residential care facilities: Enhance child protection policies and practices in institutional settings like orphanages and residential care facilities, including staff training, monitoring mechanisms, and quality standards, to ensure the safety, well-being, and rights of children in institutional care.

24. Develop early childhood development programs to support the holistic development of children: Establish early childhood development programs providing comprehensive support for children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development, including early education, health services, and parental support, to lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.

25.

North Korea has pledged to eradicate child, early, and forced marriage by 2030, aligning with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, in their 2021 Voluntary National Review submitted at the High-Level Political Forum, the government did not mention anything about child marriage. Prioritize the prevention of child marriage and early unions: Implement measures to prevent child marriage and early unions, including raising awareness, providing access to education and reproductive health services, and enforcing legal restrictions, to protect children, especially girls, from harmful practices and promote their rights to autonomy and education.

26. Combat the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, including online exploitation: Strengthen efforts to combat the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, including online exploitation, through awareness campaigns, law enforcement, victim support services, and international cooperation, to protect children from harm and ensure perpetrators are held accountable.

27. Address the root causes of child labor, including poverty and lack of access to education: Tackle the root causes of child labor, such as poverty, lack of access to education, and discrimination, through poverty reduction measures, educational reforms, social protection programs, and community development initiatives, to promote children's rights and well-being.

28. Ensure access to justice and reparations for child victims of abuse and exploitation: Guarantee access to justice, legal aid, and reparations for child victims of abuse and

exploitation, including compensation, rehabilitation, and psychosocial support, to promote their recovery, healing, and empowerment, and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

29. Promote children's participation and empowerment in decision-making processes: Foster children's participation and empowerment in decision-making processes that affect their lives, including through child-friendly mechanisms, youth councils, and education programs on children's rights and leadership, to ensure their voices are heard and respected, enhancing their agency and well-being.

30. Identify and address root causes of violence against children: Conduct thorough research and analysis to identify underlying factors contributing to violence against children, and implement targeted interventions and social policies aimed at addressing these root causes, including poverty, social inequality, and lack of access to education and support services.

31. Provide training for law enforcement and judicial personnel on child protection: Offer comprehensive training programs for law enforcement officers, judges, prosecutors, and other relevant personnel on child protection laws, procedures, and best practices to ensure effective response to cases of child abuse and exploitation.

32. Implement measures to prevent child labor and ensure access to education: Enact and enforce measures to prevent and eliminate child labor, providing access to quality education and opportunities for children to develop and thrive without resorting to exploitative labor.

33. Promote community-based child protection mechanisms: Foster the development of community-based child protection mechanisms, including community watch groups and child protection committees, empowering local communities to identify, prevent, and respond to child protection issues effectively.

34. Strengthen legal frameworks to prosecute perpetrators of child abuse and exploitation: Enhance legal frameworks and strengthen law enforcement capacities to effectively investigate, prosecute, and punish perpetrators of child abuse and exploitation, ensuring justice for victims and accountability for offenders.

b. Forced Labor Eradication

35. Eradicate forced labor, especially among children, in alignment with SDG 8.7: Take decisive action to eliminate all forms of forced labor, particularly among children, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, by implementing laws and policies that prohibit and penalize forced labor practices and ensuring protection and rehabilitation for victims.

36. Provide vocational training and alternative livelihood options for families at risk of resorting to child labor: Offer vocational training programs and sustainable livelihood options for families facing economic hardship, empowering them to generate income and support their children's education without relying on child labor.

c. Family Communication Rights

37. Protect communication rights, especially for families separated by borders: Ensure that families, particularly those separated by national borders, have the unrestricted right to maintain regular communication with each other, facilitating emotional support and family cohesion despite geographical distances.

d. Coordination and Collaboration

38. Enhance coordination among government agencies and NGOs working on child protection: Strengthen collaboration and coordination among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders involved in child protection to ensure a cohesive and effective approach in addressing the needs of vulnerable children.

e. Children with Disabilities

39. Ensure inclusive education for children with disabilities: Implement policies and practices that promote the full integration of children with disabilities into mainstream schools. Provide necessary accommodations and support services to ensure equal opportunities for learning and social interaction.

40. Improve access to healthcare services: Ensure that children with disabilities have access to comprehensive healthcare services, including specialized care and assistive devices, to address their specific needs and promote their overall well-being.

41. Provide assistive devices and support services: Equip children with disabilities with necessary assistive devices and provide access to support services tailored to their individual

requirements. This includes physical aids, communication devices, and therapeutic interventions.

42. Promote awareness and advocacy: Conduct awareness campaigns to foster understanding and acceptance of children with disabilities within society. Advocate for their rights to education, healthcare, and social inclusion, promoting a supportive environment that values diversity.

43. Train educators and healthcare professionals: Provide comprehensive training programs for educators and healthcare professionals on effectively supporting children with disabilities. This includes understanding their needs, implementing inclusive practices, and providing appropriate assistance.

44. Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: Implement monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at supporting children with disabilities. Use data and feedback to identify areas for improvement and ensure continuous enhancement of support services.

Notes:

² The effect of early trauma on North Korean refugee youths' mental health: Moderating effect of emotional regulation strategies, *Psychiatry Research*, volume 287, may 2020, 112707, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165178119313769>

³ 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: North Korea, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/north-korea/>

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⁷ WHITE PAPER HUMAN RIGHTS NORTH KOREA, October 15, 2024, <https://www.kinu.or.kr/pyxis-api/1/digital-files/57767ac0-6fea-4389-bbcf-fbe05fde4e71>

⁸ SDG11, April 8, 2022, https://en-nksdg.org/sdg_11

⁹ Are North Koreans Living a Healthy Life?, July 24, 2023, https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/14468/1/%EC%84%B8%EB%B6%80%EB%B3%B4%EA%B3%A0%EC%84%9C3_%EA%B1%B4%EA%B0%95%EA%B6%8C_%EC%98%81%EB%AC%B8_%EC%B5%9C%EC%A2%85%EC%9D%B8%EC%87%84%EB%B3%B8%E2%98%85.pdf

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- ¹³ Children’s Rights Protection Law of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea(2014), <https://www.lawandnorthkorea.com/laws/childrens-rights-protection-law-2014>
- ¹⁴ Family Law of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea(2009), <https://www.lawandnorthkorea.com/laws/family-law-2009>
- ¹⁶ Violation of Children’s Rights in North Korea, PSCORE, https://pscore.org/wp-content/uploads/ViolationChildrenRights-ENGLISH-NOT_INCLUDING-TAIWAN-PDF.pdf
- ¹⁸ North Korea Controls Youth Through ‘Hard Labor’, Human Rights Watch, September 2, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/02/north-korea-controls-youth-through-hard-labor>
- ²⁰ Accountability essential to counter human rights abuse in DPR Korea, UN News, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147791>
- ²¹ OHCHR, August 17, 2023 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session52/A_HRC_52_65_AdvanceUneditedVersion.docx
- ²² <https://borgenproject.org/fight-against-human-trafficking-in-north-korea/>
- ²² <https://pscore.org/life-north-korea/child-labor/>
- ²³ White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2022, <https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/14302/1/White%20Paper%20on%20Human%20Rights%20in%20North%20Korea%202022.pdf>
- ²⁴ North Koreans’ Current Living Conditions Based on UNICEF Survey Results: With a Focus on the Status of Infant Nutrition, January 1, 2019, <https://www.kinu.or.kr/pyxis-api/1/digital-files/160475f7-1f20-4f72-9a7b-b7ea58aef920>
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- ²⁶ PSCORE, 2021. 11. 28, <https://pscore.org/life-north-korea/child-abuse/>
- ²⁶ 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: North Korea, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/north-korea/>
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- ²⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/08/dprk-steps-advance-human-rights-and-justice-are-vital-building-sustainable-peace>
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³⁴ DPRK Must Take Immediate Steps to Adress Child Abuse, https://pscore.org/wp-content/uploads/Written-Statement_4387_A_HRC_43_NGO_Sub_En.pdf

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³⁶ World Report 2024: North Korea, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/north-korea#81c309>

³⁷ Korea's Divided Families: Time and the Vanishing Hopes of the First Generation, <https://www.38north.org/2020/09/jfoley092120/>

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⁴² Project Proposal DPRK, <https://unprpd.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/DPRK-Project-ACC-464.docx>

⁴³ Health | UNICEF Democratic People's Republic of Korea, <https://www.unicef.org/dprk/health>

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