1. **Program in Child and Youth Rights--General Overview**
   1. **Goal of the Program**

This program aims to serve as a focal point for Israeli-Palestinian and international interdisciplinary research on child and youth rights. The program will have two main areas of emphasis —expanding the theoretical scope of child rights in Israel and worldwide, and enhancing practical tools to apply theoretical knowledge to public policy, legislation, and case law in Israel, and ultimately internationally. To achieve these aims, the program will establish extensive collaborations with a wide range of faculties and research institutes within and outside the university, including legal clinics and the Haruv Institute. Recognizing the importance of comparative, inter-state, and international research, the program will collaborate with international university and research institutes, and international child rights organizations. Further, to advance its research, the program will liaise with civil society organizations to harness their vast knowledge about the practical application of the law. These organizations are not only an important arena for research, but also a natural testing ground for the applicability and practical implications of the program’s research outcomes for the benefit and protection of children.

* 1. **Main Activities of the Program**

According to the proposed goals, the program will serve as a framework for encouraging and promoting research by faculty members in Israel and abroad, research students at various career stages (masters, doctoral, and postdoctoral), and professionals in the field, including senior officials from various authorities, educators, and activists in organizations. The Center will help these professionals draw on their vast knowledge and experience to conduct empirical and theoretical research. To this end, the program will issue calls for scholarships for research students, research fellows, and senior research fellows, and calls for grants for specific studies. On the basis of these calls, we will create a matrix dividing the research into three main themes (see below), according to their multidisciplinary nature (see below), and taking into account their multidisciplinary dimension (as noted above), and the development of human research capital (i.e., the next generation of researchers). Emphasis will also be placed on diversity, i.e. ensuring the commitment to research and integrate Palestinian children and youth into the studies. Research outcomes will be analyzed and presented at roundtables and conferences, in support of the program, and published in leading international academic journals (the program can assist with the costs of editing, submission, and access costs).

We propose that the program hold an annual interdisciplinary workshop to present its research, with themes that will change each year (and expand on the themes discussed below). The workshops will serve as a forum for the graduate students and researchers funded by the program, as well as for other researchers. With the approval of the Teaching Committee, the workshops will award credits to participating students who write papers in response to the research presented.

Alongside the research, which will form the heart of the program, the program will also serve as a center for hosting unique courses, workshops, and lectures on core topics (see below). These courses will be open, depending on the unique characteristics of each, to relevant audiences—students, researchers and/or professionals working in the field, and, where possible, to children and adolescents. The program will also advance child and youth rights through position papers, *amici curiae* (“friend of the court” briefs), and commentaries to legal memoranda, etc., via partnerships with legal clinics and social organizations as noted above. These outputs, along with research outcomes, will be published on the program’s website.

* 1. **Areas of focus for implementing the program’s goals**

**Supporting research and visiting scholars at the Center**

As stated, the program will advance research through provision of scholarships, thus promoting theory and doctrine, legal thought, and thought in other disciplines. The program will also nurture a new generation of researchers in this field.

* We seek to focus on scholarships that enable the Center to host visiting tenure track faculty from overseas and from Israeli academic institutions or research centers, specializing in areas related to child and youth rights, for two weeks to a semester each year. In addition to participating in direct research (theoretical, empirical, and comparative), visiting researchers will teach intensive elective courses for undergraduate and postgraduate students, including research courses on program-related topics. Visiting researchers will also deliver a guest lecture at the Center’s main research workshop. Where appropriate, we will also consider multi-session workshops aimed at audiences and practitioners affiliated with the program. This will enrich the theoretical and comparative background in the field, help create a community to support the advanced study of research students, and generate grant proposals to research foundations.
* We also proposing focusing on scholarships for studies and researchers across a variety of disciplines. Supporting masters, doctoral, and postdoctoral research students in interdisciplinary research would be a positive investment encouraging the development of a multidisciplinary child rights community. The goal is to encourage and support researchers and create a group that can work collaboratively, enjoying cross-pollination, joint thinking, and mutual feedback. Members of the group will be involved in the program’s activities and will benefit from its guest lectures and other activities. We anticipate that the program will offer a research support framework and grants for masters, doctoral, and postdoctoral students whose research interests are related to the program’s research topics. Thus, we can develop the next generation of scholars in this field.
* A third area of focus is diversity of human capital and research topics. Each year, the program will secure professional positions for students and/or researchers at various career stages, and for professionals in the field, whose research focuses on Palestinian children and youth in Israel, Bedouin children, children from East Jerusalem, and, if possible, from the West Bank. In addition, the program will also support and encourage research where children and adolescents themselves will be heard as interview subjects, or will take an active part in other ways.

**A platform for presenting and publishing cutting-edge research**

According to our vision, the program will host an annual international conference showcasing original research on child and youth rights. The conference will present papers that have not been published elsewhere, in the form of presentations, responses, and panel discussions. The conference will identify key findings from the research for publication in a dedicated journal that will be established as part of the program. As there is currently no leading journal in the field of child and youth rights, if the program succeeds in establishing such a journal, producing it at a high academic standard, and publishing the highest-quality papers from those presented at the conference as well as other unpublished, this would represent an impressive achievement that would position the program at the forefront of the field.

**Methodological Emphases: Interdisciplinary Disciplines**

At the heart of the program, of course, is the law, in which context children are key actors as parties entitled to legal protection, and/or who seek to use legal means to advance their own interests or make their voices heard, for individual matters and more general issues concerning children as a group. Children may also find themselves subject to legal sanctions if they are suspected of deviating from the norm or of criminality. Furthermore, in the absence of political, social, or economic power, the law is sometimes the only arena and instrument available to children to exercise and protect their rights. Thus, within the legal world, a large variety of fields are relevant to this research, the main ones being public law (constitutional and administrative), substantive and procedural criminal law, classical civil law (including civil procedural law, welfare law (including social security, health, and labor), family law, and law and technology. In each of these areas, unique questions arise regarding children as subjects and objects of the law.

However, the law interfaces with a large variety of disciplines and areas of research dealing with children’s rights, which must also be referenced. Hence, the program can serve as a nexus for research that will deepen understanding of these disciplines and of the law itself. Initially, meaningful research collaborations could be created with faculty members and students from the following disciplines: social sciences (social work, psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminology, education; and gender studies), humanities (literature, history, Bible studies and Jewish thought, and Islamic studies); media, communication, and cinema; economics; political science and public policy; international relations; Middle Eastern studies; computer science, internet and social studies; medicine and public health; and life sciences. Following a preliminary study, I have become acquainted with researchers in Israel and overseas in each of these fields, and am convinced that a more in-depth review could expand on the above list. Thus, the calls for scholarships described above should take into account the development of interdisciplinary research, at least regarding research students in the above fields.

**Methodological emphases: types of research**

As noted, the program will undertake theoretical and empirical research applying various methods. It is apparent that the vast majority of issues concerning children’s lives, and how these interact with child rights, have not yet been fully explored. The aim of the program is to advance theoretical research of these little-researched areas, as well as to attempt to close the gap between theory and the real world. As noted, civil society organizations dealing with child rights in Israel have accumulated a vast amount of knowledge regarding the real-life challenges that arise when exercising those rights in practice. At the same time, these organizations are in a position to conduct pilot studies regarding the real-world applicability and implications of specific solutions examined in theoretical studies. Most of the leading Israeli children’s rights organizations and field personnel are known to me personally, including The Israel National Council for the Child, ELEM—Youth in Distress, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (part of whose work is focused on children in East Jerusalem and the Bedouin community), as well as the legal clinics for children and youth in leading law schools in Israel. The various studies will be required to directly integrate not just the field professionals, social activists, and those who work with and for children in various authorities and institutions, but also the children themselves.

**II. Subject of Research: Childhood as a Conceptual Range**

**Childhood and youth: a conceptual range / child diversity**

Before delving into the research themes, it is important to focus on the child, whose rights are at the heart of the proposed program. Despite the use of the term “children and youth,” childhood is a broad concept in terms of its time frame, from infancy through adulthood. While the law attempts to define the end of childhood as legal maturity (in Israeli law, a person ceases to be a minor upon reaching the age of 18), in reality, childhood is not a binary concept. Its boundaries are not rigid, but shift according to a child’s personal characteristics, degree of development, and abilities. There is no set upper limit to this range, and it is common to think of childhood and adolescence as a continuum that extends through “emerging adulthood.” The concept of childhood also changes over time, and according to the cultural background of a particular youth. Indeed, diversity is not only associated with a child’s age but also with other characteristics, such as gender, which requires us to look at a different set of research questions and references to the unique characteristics of girls and female adolescents. These can include cultural, national, and/or religious affiliation, with particular emphasis on minority groups within Israeli society, as well as questions of socioeconomic status, with emphasis on the particular needs of children living in poverty.

**III: Major research themes—general**

Below are the three key research themes that I believe should be at the heart of the program, as main topics for calls for proposals. Here, two points should be emphasized First, these are only preliminary themes. One of the first steps the program should take is to map out and prioritize relevant areas of research. For this purpose, a scientific committee will be convened, and the first international conference will also be dedicated to this task. In addition to the three main themes set out below, there could also be an “open” call for proposals for studies not falling within the predetermined topics. I propose that when selecting research topics, there should be a kind of “hackathon” for research proposals that will be submitted for review by the Scientific Committee. As part of the process of selecting research proposals and prioritizing research areas, it would only be right to include children and adolescents at some point in the decision-making process, to reveal their concerns and perceived needs. Secondly, some of the research questions are interconnected, and will benefit from a multifaceted approach. Some questions have been placed under the first theme, but are also relevant to the second and/or third theme, and so on. Therefore, a research question will be associated with its primary theme.

**3.1 At-risk children and youth**

In legal contexts, and for the purposes of this document, there is room to consider several at-risk groups in conjunction, despite there being differences between them. **Children are at risk** because of a wide range of circumstances. This can include, for example, children whose parents are at high risk of separating; children living in a large-scale epidemic, such as the coronavirus epidemic; children living under occupation; **children harmed by their parents or other adults in care/supervision roles**, as a result of violence, sexual abuse, or neglect**;** and c**hildren who break the law** or who harm other children. Children in all these groups require unique consideration, with their rights are weighed alongside their specific vulnerabilities, together with the contexts of their families and communities.

Children who are at risk, who have been neglected, harmed by violence or abuse, or who have harmed others, need responses that safeguard their rights. This includes their right to maintain family ties in a way that their family and their extended community are integrated within the design of such a response. While in extreme situations, separation from the family, or temporary or permanent removal of a child from the family is required, such cases are by definition rare. In many cases, both where children are the victims and where they are the offenders, the diagnosis, treatment, and sometimes the final response are made with, and within, the family and community.

The treatment of children as rights holders in these and other contexts creates a particular tension requiring a unique response. One perspective, viewing the child as an individual with rights, raises the question of giving the child a voice—the opportunity to have the adults around them listen and consider the child’s opinion. No less important is the question of nonetheless treating the child in a special way, taking into account their young age, vulnerabilities, still-forming abilities, and inherent dependence on the adults in their life. The role of the court is to find a solution to the tension between these set of concerns, while adjusting the law—including the legal structures within which it operates (e.g., the nature of the judicial tribunal), the conduct of its officials (e.g., the judge, or legal guardian), the procedural tools applied (investigation by children’s committees), and the content of the law itself (including how rights should be understood)—to meet the unique characteristics of the child. It is only when these adjustments are made that, in my understanding, the rights of the child can be realized. In this context, we can and should discuss the spirit of the child-friendly guidelines of the Council of Europe.

The variety of situations that fall under the broad definition of “children at risk” give rise to a wide range of research questions that require theoretical and empirical answers. I present a few of these here, but it is clear that choosing this as one of the main themes for this research could be a hospice for many important studies, whether narrow or broad in scope:

1. **Children and youth at risk**—A wide range of life situations create risk and pose challenges. Children with complex life circumstances may be more vulnerable, such as children from ethnic or national minority groups living in situations of conflict over belonging or affiliation, or environments of political or security conflicts; children of immigrants, migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers; children without a family (unattached children), street children; children in care; children living in poverty; child engaging in the sex industry or children who have been trafficked for various purposes; and children with disabilities or children struggling with identity or sexual orientation.

Each of the above groups raise unique questions and can provide fertile ground for theoretical or empirical research, which the program could accommodate.

1. **Child victims of crime**—Research in this context should focus on several issues, including early prevention of child harm; protection, remedies, and compensation for child victims of crime; and legal enforcement against the perpetrators of the crimes. An important context for this research should be the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (“the CRC”) (including Articles 34, 36, and 39). Research in this context should be linked to the impressive work of the Haruv Institute. Among other things, it is necessary to initiate and connect with studies focusing on research tailored to children in general, children from specific cultural groups, and children with disabilities. A complementary area to the research to be explored is that of legal proceedings against perpetrators of crime, and the realization and assurance of the rights of the child victim of crime in these proceedings (including after the release of the offender from prison).

In this context also, a variety of research questions arise that justify further clarification and depth. One or two examples should suffice. A particularly troubling issue that neither the legal or treatment frameworks know how to deal with complaints of child sexual abuse that arise during divorce disputes and in circumstances of extreme parental conflict. This area requires research to chart this phenomenon, and offer ways to address the dilemmas arising from the emotionally charged complexity that “contaminates” investigations as a result of the interests of a parent or parents in the complaint. Another example, ostensibly the opposite of the above, but essentially very close, to it involves the tension that arises as a result of a conflict of interest between a child victim and someone who is supposed to protect the child and help the child exercise his or her rights as a victim of an offense. This occurs in cases where there is a normal relationship between the child’s parents, but one of them harms the child; or where the offender is a child and the victim is a sibling. Such circumstances pose a challenge to the concept of child rights and emphasize the gap between the inflexibility of criminal proceedings, with its binary outcome of a conviction or acquittal, and relatively limited range of sanctions, and the complexity of the relationship between the child victim and his or her wider environment—whether a nuclear or extended family, community, or other group.

1. **Children who break the law**—Within this theme, there is also a need for ongoing work in securing children’s rights in criminal proceedings as part of Articles 37 and 40 of the CRC. In this context, it is worthwhile to consider the rights of children who break the law before and during trial, and after conviction. It is also important to evaluate mechanisms for rehabilitating abusive children or children who broke the law, including decriminalization of certain offenses or in certain life circumstances. Again, and for the purpose of this document, I will mention physical or sexual injury caused by children or adolescents to other children; violations of property offenses (among children and youth in financial distress); and public order offenses committed through expressions of social or political protest that can constitute, according to accepted official definitions, security violations. (these are only preliminary examples).
2. Another broad issue concerning children and youth at risk involves the child’s right to personal development according to Article 6 of the CRC. Israel suffers from growing socioeconomic inequality, and children belonging to the lower deciles (sometimes these are groups that intersect with national or ethnic minorities) suffer from a lack of opportunities. This issue has not been properly addressed, and its implications for children are intensifying.
3. Another issue I would like to address concerns children as a whole, but may raise or refine questions regarding children at risk. A compelling question that is theoretical but also practical relates to the concept of children’s emancipation. This subject is sufficiently broad to encompass a wide range of situations, from the right of children to have their voices heard or take an active and significant part in decisions that affect their fate in the context of Article 12 of the CRC, through the right to manage a bank account, elect authorities, and even to liberate themselves from their parents and act with a greater degree of independence.
   1. As part of this topic, we could investigate the involvement of children in family court proceedings. Initially, we need to examine how hearings are conducted, and gather information regarding the experiences of the children themselves, and the effect on their well-being. Such research, whose seeds have already started to sprout, is empirical in nature and should include interviews with the main actors: judges, support unit personnel, and especially the children themselves and their parents.
   2. A completely different issue is that of legislative regulation regarding child hearings in court. It is interesting to note that the law does not specify a specific age for children to participate in hearings on significant legal decisions that affect their futures. Thus, although the law requires hearing or involving children in questions of placing children in care, there are no unified parameters specifying how children are heard or the age threshold for obtaining their testimony with respect to medical treatment, psychiatric hospitalization, treatment for gender adjustment, adoption placement, religious conversion, change of name, or exercises of rights under the Victims of Crime Rights Act. A possible theoretical study could examine the entirety of relevant laws, the age that has been determined for each of these, understand the rationale behind these ages, and, if necessary, propose a new, comprehensive, and coherent way of approaching this issue. The question of the age at which children’s testimonies should be heard and how to conduct children’s hearings are among the many issues calling for attention and clarification.
   3. A more direct aspect of the concept of child emancipation concerns the possibility of children being allowed to act independently from their parents. Examples range from youth participation in municipal elections, issuing drivers licenses, opening a bank account, enrolling for studies or professional training, through liberation from parents in order to obtain a child allowance or live outside the home, and liberation from parental involvement in decisions that affect their fate. These, too, require a combination of theoretical and empirical research.

Each of these, as widespread phenomena, justify interdisciplinary consideration, combining the fields of law, criminology, therapy, social work, and education; and in some cases, medicine and heath, gender, international relations, public policy, etc. Such an interdisciplinary approach will make it possible to generate multifaceted research, in a unique and changing context, and provide a buffer for multidisciplinary thinking to generate unique and real-world applicable responses to children and adolescents from diverse groups in Israeli and Palestinian society.