

Children at the Centre

A Children's Rights Charter for the new UK Government



We are calling on the new UK Government to take urgent action on children's rights. The UK ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991, which means all areas of government and the state - including local government, schools and health services - must adhere to its principles and standards and do all they can to realise these rights. **The UNCRC sets out the fundamental human rights that all children should have, so that every child is able to have a good childhood and develop to their full potential.** This includes their right to an adequate standard of living, access to education and healthcare, and to be cared for and protected regardless of their background or circumstances.

However, **many children's rights have worsened across the country, with devastating cuts to children's services, rising child poverty, worsening mental health, widening education gaps, increasing violence, abuse and neglect, including at the hands of the state,¹ and persistent and increased discrimination and structural inequality.**

A key principle of the UNCRC is the right of all children to express their views and have them given due weight in all decisions that affect them - both at an individual and strategic level. But despite pockets of good practice, **all too often children's views and voices are absent from government decision-making. This needs to change.**

In June 2023, the UK was examined on its compliance with the UNCRC. While the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the UN Committee) recognised that some progress has been made, it made almost 200 recommendations² to the UK Government to better protect and promote children's rights. **We urge the new UK Government to put children's rights at the centre of decision-making and take concrete action to implement the UN Committee's recommendations,** including the UNCRC General Measures of Implementation - the laws, structures and mechanisms that need to be in place if the UNCRC is to be fully implemented.³



We ask the new UK Government to take the following measures to uphold children's rights:

❶ **Develop a Child Rights Action Plan or strategy**, setting out how the recommendations made by the UN Committee will be addressed, with clear, resourced, timebound actions and a monitoring framework. UK children's charities⁴ are calling for an ambitious, multi-year, cross-sector government strategy, which sets out its vision for children and a clear roadmap to drive improvements in every area of children's lives. The strategy should provide a framework for working within and across government departments to implement the Concluding Observations from the UN Committee, on the issues raised in the UK's last review process. The UN Committee made many recommendations⁵, across several areas: non-discrimination; abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation; children deprived of a family environment; mental health; asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children; children in the criminal justice system; child poverty; violence against children; and education, leisure and play. Implementation should be led and coordinated by a Cabinet Minister for Children.

❷ Create a government department for children and appoint a **Cabinet Minister for Children** with cross-departmental responsibility for driving forward implementation of a Child Rights Action Plan. We are calling for a Cabinet Minister for Children to ensure that oversight and coordination of a children's rights plan takes place at the highest levels of government and drives implementation of the UN Committee's recommendations.

❸ **Introduce a statutory obligation on public authorities to conduct Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs)** in all policy and spending decisions affecting children, and ensure adequate resources and training are in place to support CRIA processes. The UN Committee calls for the systematic use of CRIAs to avoid or mitigate negative impacts on children (including unintended consequences), and make sure that policymaking upholds their rights. Use of the current CRIA template tool, used by central government departments, should be improved. It is also crucial that a key part of carrying out a CRIA includes considering the views of children and young people to ensure their voices are central to government decision-making. CRIAs should be transparent, participatory, and publicly available to ensure they are an effective tool to support accountability for decisions that affect children's rights. A statutory obligation to conduct CRIAs in England would ensure consistency with similar requirements in Wales and Scotland.

❹ **Increase budget allocations for children** and adopt a child rights-based approach to budgeting processes, which addresses disparities and inequality and invests in early intervention and prevention. The UN Committee recommended a tracking system for the allocation, use and monitoring of resources for children, specific budget allocations for children in disadvantaged situations and the need to ensure that children are not affected by austerity measures. Children's services, including children's social care, are vastly under-funded, with rising demand, growing pressure on over-stretched services and a high increase in the number of looked-after children.⁶ Significant investment in children is urgently needed, including funding for educational recovery and addressing educational attainment gaps, funding for children's services and social care that invests in early intervention and therapeutic services, and mental health support, as well as to address child poverty.⁷

⑤ **Develop a strategy for increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC**, including for all professionals working with children, particularly those in institutions. The UN Committee raised concerns on the low levels of knowledge on the UNCRC. It recommends systematic training on children's rights and the UNCRC for all professionals working with and for children, especially those working in education, social work, law enforcement, immigration and the justice system.

⑥ **Incorporate the UNCRC into domestic law.** The UN Committee has consistently advised that the most powerful driver for the implementation of children's rights comes through giving direct force to the UNCRC in national legislation. The Committee has repeatedly urged the UK to fully incorporate the UNCRC into national legislation. UNCRC incorporation would bring the UK government in closer alignment with measures already taken in Wales and Scotland through the *Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2014* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024*.

We urge the new UK Government to take these six steps to ensure that all children can have a happy, safe and fulfilling childhood and are able to reach their full potential.

Endnotes

1. [Written evidence from the Children's Rights Alliance for England to the Human Rights Committee for its examination of the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, CRAE, February 2024](#)
2. [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child \(2023\) Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, UNCRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7](#)
3. [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child \(2003\) General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child \(arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6](#)
4. [Children at the Table: A roadmap for putting children at the heart of the next Government Action for Children](#), Barnardo's, National Children's Bureau, NSPCC, The Children's Society, November 2023
5. For a summary of the recommendations see our [briefings](#) produced in partnership with Unicef UK and the Equality and Human Rights Commission
6. [Stopping the spiral. Children and young people's services spending 2010-2011 to 2020-21](#) Pro Bono Economics, in association with Max Williams and Jon Franklin, July 2022
7. [What about the children? How the UK's decision-makers considered children and young people during the Covid-19 pandemic](#) Save the Children, Children's Rights Alliance for England, Just for Kids Law, September 2023

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