

Young People's Summary (12-17)

A hand holding a red magnifying glass over a dark door with the number 10. The door is set in a light blue building facade with a window above it. A black fence is visible in the foreground. The magnifying glass is held by a brown hand from the bottom right, focusing on the door.

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**How well are
we respecting
children's rights?**

The United Nations' verdict 2016

Foreword

**By Robert Goodwill MP,
Minister for Children & Families**

“I am sure you all receive reports from your teachers telling you what you have done well at and things where you may need help to improve. Last summer the Prime Minister and her Government got their report back from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee) on how well we are respecting children’s rights in the UK.

The UK is a great place to grow up, and in its report the UN Committee told us that we are doing lots of things to make sure we live up to our promise to respect children’s rights. Most of what the UN Committee said was good, but we can always do better - and it is our job to help the Prime Minister do that.

We need to do more to make sure schools help you to stay safe, and this includes when you are using the internet. So we decided it was right for you to be taught about this at school.

We also need people working for the Government to think more about children and families when making important decisions. So we are helping the rest of the Government to understand how important it is for them to consider children and their views when making decisions which affect you and your families.

I hope you enjoy reading the report from the UN Committee and that it helps you think about what adults, including politicians, can do to respect your rights and follow the rules set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

What are children's rights?



The United Nations was set up after the Second World War to help people live peacefully together and with respect and understanding. The United Nations does many different things like helping to maintain peace; humanitarian work (helping people in need); and making sure human rights are respected (these are rules which set out how everyone should be treated). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UN Convention) is a set of rules which sets out how all children across the world should be treated. In the UN Convention a child is defined as anyone who is aged 17 years or younger. However, this can be patronising for older children so in this leaflet we say 'children and young people'.

The rules in the UN Convention took ten years to develop and were finally agreed by the UN in 1989. It gives over 40 different rights to children and young people, including, the right to be protected from all forms of violence; to play; have an education; to have views taken seriously in decision-making; and that their families should have enough money and a decent place to live so children and young people can have a good childhood and grow up well. It also gives special rights to children in challenging circumstances, for example, disabled children and those who are in trouble with the law. Look at the box at the end of this leaflet to find out where you can learn more about children's rights.

Checking up on children's rights



In 1991 the UK ratified the UN Convention. This means the UK Government made a promise to respect children's rights.

Roughly every five years a group of experts on children's rights from the United Nations - called the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the UN Committee) - checks how well a government is respecting children's rights (governments are responsible for making sure that children have their rights respected). The UN Committee looks at lots of information about how well children's rights are being followed including from children's charities, human rights organisations, children and young people and the government of the country being examined. At the end of the examination, it publishes a document called the 'Concluding Observations'. This sets out where the UN Committee thinks a government is doing well and where it needs to do better. It also gives recommendations on what action the government should take to improve things for children. The UN last examined the UK in June 2016. The UK is made up of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own governments and parliaments and are able to make some decisions that affect children and young people. The UN Committee reported on all parts of the UK but this leaflet is on children living in England.



How well are we respecting children's rights?

The UN Committee said that the UK Government has taken some welcome steps to make sure that children have their rights respected.

It was pleased that the Government has strengthened the role of Children's Commissioner for England (this is a special position set up in law and funded by the Government to promote children's rights) by making it more independent from the UK Government and making sure that all its work is framed by the UN Convention. The UN Committee was also pleased that the UK Government had done lots of other things to improve children's lives. Examples of the good things the Government have done are:

- ★ Improving protection and support for children who have been trafficked.
- ★ Reducing the number of teenage girls getting pregnant.
- ★ Strengthening the law on domestic violence so that trying to control or force someone to do something they don't want to is illegal. Domestic violence is violence between two people aged 16 years or over who are partners, married or members of the same family.
- ★ Taking action to make sure children are kept safe and better protected from harm.
- ★ Taking steps to give further protection to girls at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is the practice of partially or totally removing the external genitalia of girls and young women for non-medical reasons.
- ★ Providing help to parents for the care of young children (for example in nurseries).

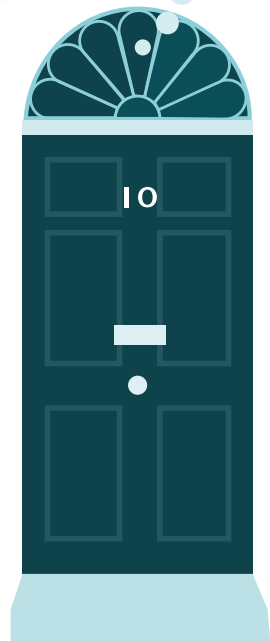
- ★ Reducing the educational achievement gap. This is the difference between how well some groups of children do at school compared to other groups because of their background. This could be things like coming from a family without much money or living in care.
- ★ Significantly reducing the numbers of children who are put in prison after breaking the law.

However, despite these good developments, the UN Committee said that the Government still needed to do more before children in this country have their rights fully respected.



Making sure governments think about children

The UK Government and local authorities make lots of decisions that have an impact on children and young people, for example, deciding what they learn at school, how children and young people who get in trouble with the law should be treated; how hospitals are run; how much money should be given to families who don't earn very much or cannot find a job; and how much money should be spent on parks and libraries. **Because of this the UN Committee thinks more needs to be done to make sure that when both national and local government is making a decision about a new law, or how much money to spend on something, they need to think more about the impact it will have on children.** The UN Committee also said that the UK Government should develop a plan which sets out what it will do to make sure children's rights are better respected.



Listening to children and young people



Children and young people have views about lots of things just like adults. The UN Committee thinks it's really important to listen to children and young people when deciding things that will affect them. It was concerned that children and young people in this country don't always feel listened to by adults they have contact with such as teachers, social workers and paid carers. It said that **more needs to be done to make sure that children and young people are listened to and their views considered when a decision is being made that will affect them.**



Having enough money



The UN Committee was worried that there are children in this country who live in families who do not have enough money to ensure they have all the things children and young people need to grow and develop. Things like having the heating on in the winter; warm clothes and enough food. **The UN Committee was concerned that help given to families with children who do not have much money has been reduced.** The UN Committee said that the UK Government needed to do more to make sure that this problem was solved and should put back a target to make sure that this issue is tackled properly. A target to make sure that by 2020 there are no children living in families with not enough money was removed by the Government in 2016. The UN Committee said that when the Government makes decisions about how to spend its money it needs to think more about how they will affect children and young people, especially those who live in families without much money.

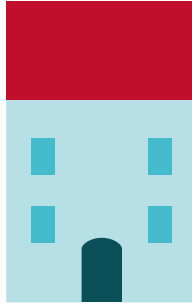




Having a decent place to live

The UN Committee was concerned that some children and young people do not have a decent home to live in.

It was especially worried that some children and young people ended up living in unsuitable places for a long time. Some families have to live in places like Bed and Breakfasts (B&B's) In B&Bs children and their families need to live in one room where there isn't enough space to play or do homework. They also have to share bathrooms and kitchens with people they don't know. It can also be difficult for older children to have any privacy. It said that the UK Government must do more to make sure children do not have to live in cold, damp, unsafe or overcrowded spaces.



Children in care

Sometimes children and young people are not able to stay with their families - this could be because their parents are not able to look after them or keep them safe. If a child cannot live with their family they are taken into care. The UN Committee was worried that although the Government has tried to improve the lives of children living in care, some children still move house a lot and have to live with too many different people. The UN also thought that too many children in care still have lots of different social workers rather than the same one. It is important for children and young people to have the same social worker so they can build up trust and have a good relationship with them. Although the Government is trying to change this the UN Committee thought more needed to be done.



Keeping children safe



The UN Committee was pleased that the Government has been taking lots of action to make sure that children are kept safe but said that there was more to do, especially to ensure that children are safe online. It said that the Government needed to collect more information about child abuse and neglect (when children aren't looked after properly) and develop an action plan to make sure children and young people are kept safe from harm.



Being healthy



The UN Committee was concerned that some groups of children are not as healthy as others such as children who live in families without much money, Gypsy and Traveller children and other children from minority ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic background means the country, social group or religion where a person's ancestors come from. It recommended that the Government spend as much money as it can to make sure that all children, no matter what their background, are as healthy as possible.

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government has invested more money in mental health services for children. However, it was worried that there are lots of children that need help with their mental health. The UN Committee said that the Government needed to collect better information about how many children needed help with their mental health and develop a plan so the right help was in place for children that needed it. The UN Committee was also concerned that there aren't enough hospital places for children with serious mental health issues and that sometimes children and young people have to stay in adult hospital wards rather than with other children.



Disabled children and children with special educational needs



Just like other children, disabled children and children with special educational needs have a right to have their views listened to when decisions are made which will affect them. The UN Committee said that if a plan is put in place to give a disabled child extra help and support then they should be asked for their opinion about what help they need. The UN Committee also said that the Government needed to make sure that disabled children could go to school with non-disabled children rather than have to go to 'special schools' which were just for disabled children.



Asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children

Some children need to come to this country because of war in their own country or they are at risk of harm because of their families religious or political views. Some children come here with their families but others come here by themselves (called unaccompanied or separated children). The UN Committee was worried that separated children in this country do not have a person called an independent guardian to give them extra help and support.

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government had stopped detaining children with their families when they are not allowed to stay in the UK and are waiting to be returned to their own country.



However, the UN Committee was worried that families who were waiting to see if they could stay in this country were not always given the help they needed to access services such as school or health care. Most of these families are not allowed to work so they could struggle to provide their children with warm clothes, shoes that fit, and food to eat.

Trafficked children

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government has introduced an independent guardian for children who have been found to be trafficked and given them extra protection through a new law (called the Modern Slavery Act). However, it was disappointed that the legislation wasn't as strong as it could be by, for example, making sure that these children are always treated as victims of trafficking and not as criminals (sometimes trafficked children may be made to do things which are illegal).

Children in trouble with the law

In England, you can be convicted of committing a crime from the age of 10 (the age of criminal responsibility). The UN Committee thinks this is too young and recommended that the Government should raise the age of criminal responsibility. *There are now fewer children in prison than last time the UN Committee examined the UK, which it welcomed. But it said that too many children who commit crimes are still being locked up, especially children who come from Black, Asian or minority ethnic minority backgrounds.* It recommended that the Government make a new law which states that children should only be locked up if absolutely necessary and only for the shortest time possible. It also said that the Government should take immediate action to make sure that children in prison are always treated well and not hurt.





Children's treatment by the police



The UN Committee said that the Government needed to make sure that it had more information about which children are stopped and searched by police officers. This is so the Government can check whether or not certain groups of children are being unfairly stopped by the police. **The UN Committee also said that the police should not use Tasers on children.** A Taser is a device which can give an electric shock and is painful and frightening. The UN also Committee said that there should be better information collected and made available on how many times the police use Tasers on children.



A good education

The UN Committee was unhappy that certain groups of children continue to do less well at school than other children even though the UK Government has done a lot of things and given extra money to schools to make sure this isn't the case. Children from poorer backgrounds; children in care and Gypsy or Traveller children still don't do as well at school as other groups of children.

The UN Committee was also worried that some children cannot speak as well as they are expected to before starting school in reception class. This could mean they find it harder to learn at primary school (Reception year until year 6).






Places to play


The UN Committee said that more should be done to make sure that all children, especially disabled children and those from poorer backgrounds, have somewhere to play which is suitable for their age such as a playgroup for toddlers, a leisure centre, a skate park or somewhere to play football.





This briefing was written by Louise King, Director of the Children's Rights Alliance for England, with help from young people in the Change it steering group.

Thank you to the Department for Education for funding this publication



You can read the full version of the Concluding Observations and find out more about children's rights and the UN Convention at the Children's Rights Alliance for England's website:
[www.crae.org.uk/
childrens-rights-the-law](http://www.crae.org.uk/childrens-rights-the-law)



Children's
Rights Alliance
for England

Change *it!*

Children's Rights Alliance for England

part of Just for Kids Law

4D, Leroy House, 436 Essex Road

London, Islington, N13QP

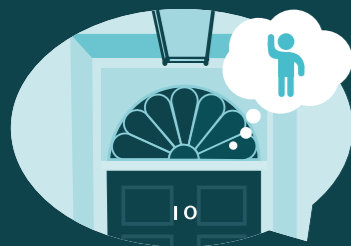
Telephone: 020 3174 2279

Fax: 020 7681 1393

Email: info@crae.org.uk

Website: www.crae.org.uk

Twitter: [@crae_official](https://twitter.com/crae_official)



1. Making sure governments think about children

National government and local authorities need to think more about the impact on children and young people when they make decisions

2. Listening to children

More needs to be done to make sure that children and young people are listened to



3. Having enough money

Too many children live in families without enough money

4. Having a decent place to live

The Government must do more to make sure children do not have to live in cold, damp, unsafe or overcrowded spaces



5. Children living in care

Although the Government has tried to solve this problem, some children in care still move house a lot and live with too many different people

6. Keeping children safe

The Government must do more to make sure that all children are kept safe from harm, including when using the internet



A summary of what the UN Committee said...



7. Making sure children are healthy

The Government must spend as much money as it can to make sure that all children, no matter what their background, are as healthy as possible

8. Disabled children & children with special educational needs

The Government must make sure that disabled children can go to school with non-disabled children



9. Asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government had stopped holding children with their families in detention centres but it thought children on their own should have a special person to help them called an independent guardian



10. Trafficked children

The UN Committee was pleased that the Government has introduced an independent guardian for children who have been found to be trafficked and has passed a new law which gives extra protection to trafficked children



11. Children in trouble with the law

The UN Committee said that too many children who commit crimes are still being locked up



12. Children's treatment by the police

The UN Committee said that the police should not use Tasers on children

13. A good education

The UN Committee was unhappy that certain groups of children continue to do less well at school even though the Government has done a lot of work and given money to try and make sure this isn't the case



14. Somewhere to play

More should be done to make sure that all children, especially disabled children and those from poorer backgrounds, have somewhere to play which is suitable for their age

Good things that the Government have done:

- ★ Improving protection and support for children who have been trafficked.
- ★ Reducing the number of teenage girls getting pregnant.
- ★ Strengthening the law on domestic violence so that trying to control or force someone to do something they don't want to is illegal.
- ★ Taking action to make sure children are kept safe and better protected from harm.
- ★ Taking steps to give further protection to girls at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM).
- ★ Providing help to parents for the care of young children (for example in nurseries).
- ★ Reducing the educational achievement gap. This is the difference between how well some groups of children do at school compared to other groups because of their background.
- ★ Significantly reducing the numbers of children who are put in prison after breaking the law.