



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

# **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

## **The Scottish Government's Initial Response to the 2023 Concluding Observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**

### **Child-Friendly Version**

**March 2024**



**United  
Nations**

This document describes how the Scottish Government is responding to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations. These were published in 2023. This document will tell you about some of the things we are doing to make things better for children and their families in Scotland.

This document is in 8 sections:

**General Measures of Implementation**

**General Principles**

**Civil Rights and Freedoms**

**Violence Against Children**

**Family Environment and Alternative Care**

**Basic Health and Wellbeing**

**Education, Leisure, and Cultural Activities**

**Special Protections and Optional Protocols**



## What is the United Nations?

The United Nations (UN) is an organisation that most countries in the world are part of. The UN helps to protect human rights. Human rights are basic rights and freedoms that everyone has. Children have the same rights as adults plus extra rights to protect them and keep them safe.

## Who are the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child?

The UN has a group of adults who know lots about children's rights. The group is called the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The experts in this group help countries across the world to think about how they can help make these rights available to all children.



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

Children's human rights are written down in a document called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC is an important agreement between lots of countries who have made a promise to protect children's rights.

The UNCRC says:

- All children have rights, and it explains what those rights are.
- Public authorities (like councils, government, health services and courts) must think about what is best for children and respect children's rights.

It also explains what adults and governments must do to protect children's rights.

## The UN Committee's Concluding Observations

In May 2023, the UK Government met with members of the UN Committee in Geneva to discuss children's rights. The Scottish Government also went to this meeting. We told the UN Committee what we are doing to help children experience their rights here in Scotland.

A group of children and young people from Scotland – known as #TeamScotlandUN – presented to the Committee in February 2023. #TeamScotlandUN was supported by Children's Parliament, Scottish Youth Parliament, and Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. This means these children and young people know lots about children and young people's experiences of their rights. #TeamScotlandUN were able to talk to the Committee about what is most important to children and young people in Scotland.

After the meeting, the UN Committee wrote to the UK Government. They suggested what more we can all do to help promote and protect children's rights.

They did this in a document called the **Concluding Observations**.



## General Measures of Implementation

What we are doing to help children experience their rights.

### The UN said...

Scotland should make the UNCRC law as soon as it can.

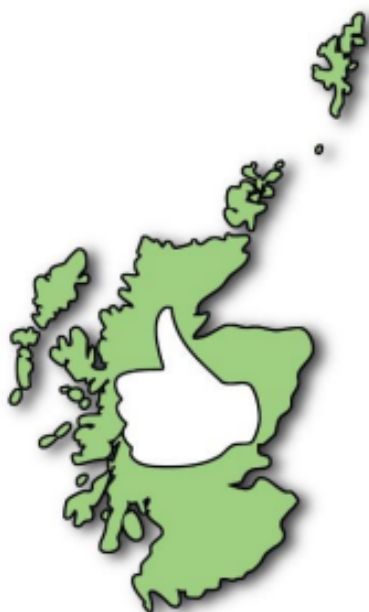
### Scottish Government said...

On 16th July 2024, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act will become law. This means that the Scottish Government and other public authorities must listen to children and protect their rights when making decisions. This includes public authorities like schools, councils, police and health services.

Children can already go directly to public authorities if they are worried about their rights. The Act means that children can now also ask the Scottish courts to help them with these problems too.

### What's next?

The UNCRC Act will become law on 16 July 2024. We will make sure that public authorities get support and guidance. This will help them understand the Act and make sure they are following what it says.



### The UN said...

Children should be able to make a complaint in a way that works for them.

### Scottish Government said...

We want to make sure that children and young people can complain if they feel their rights are not being respected.

### What are we doing?

We have given money to [The Scottish Public Service Ombudsman \(SPSO\)](#). The SPSO helps people who are unhappy with services like schools, hospitals, and councils. The SPSO is working with children and young people to make the complaints process easier for children.

### What's next?

The SPSO will share the full child-friendly complaints process in April 2024. This is to make it easier for children to complain if they think their rights are not being respected. Public authorities will learn how to follow the child-friendly complaints process and where to get help if they need it.



## The UN said...

Scotland should have a plan for telling people about children's rights.

## Scottish Government said...

It's important that children, young people, families, and public services know about children's rights. Our goal is to make sure everyone understands and supports children's rights.

## What are we doing?

We give money to UNICEF UK for their [Rights Respecting School Award \(RRSA\)](#). This helps schools know more about children rights and make sure everyone feels safe and respected.

We also made a [booklet](#) to help families learn more about Children's Rights. We give money to organisations like the Children's Parliament too. This helps them raise awareness with the children they work with.

## What's next?

In 2024, we will keep sharing information about children's rights. We'll focus on sharing this information with children and young people who need it most. We will also share this information with parents and families.



## General Principles

What we are doing to help children from all backgrounds to experience their rights and have their views heard.

### The UN said...

Children should not be treated badly because of their differences.

### Scottish Government said...

The Scottish Government wants to be a good example for other countries. We are making a plan for the Anti-Racism Observatory of Scotland (AROS).

## Our Plan: The Anti-Racism Observatory

The Anti-Racism Observatory is a group of people who will look at how racism affects different groups of people in Scotland.

They will help us make sure that people who make decisions know about anti-racism so they can make decisions that are fair to all.

### What's next?

We plan on setting up AROS in 2024 so that it can start its work on anti-racism soon.





### The UN said...

Children should be able to report crimes that have been committed against them because of their differences.

### Scottish Government said...

We want everyone to live without hate or prejudice.

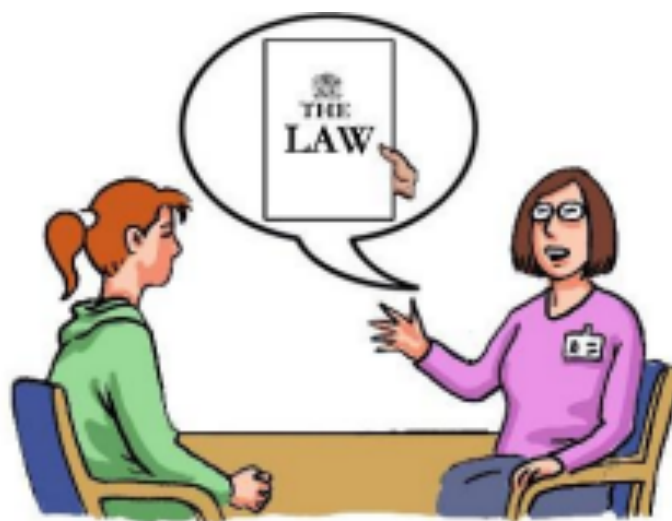
### The Hate Crime Strategy

To help make this happen, we made a plan called the Hate Crime Strategy which was published in March 2023. The plan will also help support the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021, which will become law in 2024.

### What's next?

In 2024, the Scottish Government will keep looking at what it can do to make sure all children and young people are treated fairly. In November 2023, we published the Hate Crime Strategy Delivery Plan. This plan explains our work to tackle hate crime for the next two years. This includes activity to support victims of hate crime, and to help us to understand why hate crime happens and what this looks like in Scotland. It also includes activity to make sure our communities are inclusive and safe.

The Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 will also become law in early 2024.



## Civil Rights and Freedoms

What we are doing to help children move around freely in public places and protect their rights to information and privacy.

### The UN said...

Children should have access to the internet even if they don't have a lot of money.

### Scottish Government said...

We know that some people find it hard to get online. That's why we have created a special programme called "Connecting Scotland".

## Connecting Scotland and the Digital Education Strategy

It is important that everyone has what they need to use the internet. We are working with Connecting Scotland to help some families with children who are struggling to get online. Being able to use the internet will help these families access learning materials and other services.

### What's next?

In 2024, the Scottish Government will keep working with its partners to make a document. This document will tell everyone how technology could change how we learn in schools. We know how important technology is to our education. We want to help make sure that everyone gets the chance to learn digital skills.



### **The UN said...**

Children and young people should be allowed to meet in groups to express their views and take part in protests.

### **Scottish Government said...**

Everyone should be allowed to gather and express their views.

### **Taking part in peaceful protest**

We believe that our children and young people have the right to gather safely and express their views. Children and young people have the right to protest about things they care about. We want people to be safe, so we support Police Scotland to make sure everyone can protest safely.

### **What's next?**

We will work with Police Scotland to help ensure that children and young people can meet in groups safely. We will continue to make sure that everyone's rights are protected.



## Violence Against Children

What we are doing to keep children safe and to help those who have been harmed.

### The UN said...

Children who have been hurt or treated badly should get the help they need to recover. The help should be given in a caring way and in a way that protects their rights.

### Scottish Government said...

We want all children who have been hurt or treated badly to have the help and support they need in a way that makes them feel safe.

### Bairns' Hoose

Children and young people have told us what they want this help to look like and we are acting on this. We will give children this support in places called '[Bairns' Hoose](#)'. This means that children have all the help they need in one place.

There are now six Bairns' Hoose test sites. These will support children in different parts of Scotland. We will look at how we can make the support they give to children even better. We want to make sure all children who need this support can get it.



### **The UN said...**

Children should be safe wherever they are, including online.

### **Scottish Government said...**

We know that sometimes bad people can try to hurt or trick children on the internet.

### **Parent Club Scotland and the Child Online Safety Campaign**

We created the Child Online Safety Campaign to help parents and carers. It will help them talk to children about online safety. It will help them keep children safe online. Over 900,000 people saw the campaign in three weeks in 2023.

In October 2023, we also put some new information on the Parent Club website. It has useful tips and links for parents and carers to help children stay safe online as they grow up.

### **What's next?**

We will keep checking the [Parent Club website](#) to make sure the information is up-to-date. We want to provide the best advice about how to stay safe online.

The logo for Parent Club features a stylized lowercase 'p' in purple with two dots above it, followed by the words 'Parent Club' in a bold, rounded font. 'Parent' is in red and 'Club' is in purple. The logo is tilted upwards to the right.

**Parent Club**

## Family Environment and Alternative Care

What we are doing to help parents and carers to support their children. This includes the help that is available to support children who cannot live at home with their families.

### The UN said...

Parents and children should be able to use childcare even if they don't have lots of money, or if they live in the countryside. All children should have early childhood education.

### Scottish Government said...

Childcare and early learning is very important for us as a government and for all the children and families in Scotland.

### Childcare and early learning

All three- and four-year olds in Scotland can have free early learning and childcare. We are making childcare free for more families who are unable to pay for this.

### What's next?

We will listen to children and families so that we can find out more about what kind of childcare families in different parts of Scotland want. We think there should be at least 1,000 more childminders in Scotland. This will help Scottish families look after their children, including in the countryside. We are working together with our partners to make this happen.



### The UN said...

Scotland should teach service providers to identify young carers and provide their families with support.

### Scottish Government said...

We've developed a plan called the [National Carers Strategy](#) which explains how we're making support for young carers better.

### The Carers (Scotland) Act

The Carers (Scotland) Act says every young carer has the right to a Young Carer Statement. This helps them find out what support they can get. More information about Young Carer Statements and the words used in the Carers (Scotland) Act can be found in our [Jargon Buster](#).

We're helping people who work with children and young people to learn how best to help young carers. Teachers can do a new online learning module to better understand and help young carers. School nurses are being trained to make sure that young carers get the help they need. All health workers can watch these 'Caring for Young Carers' [webinars](#) to learn about how to support young carers.

### What's next?

We've set up a Young Carer Working Group with people from inside and outside the Scottish Government. They will work together to help young carers get the support they need. We'll also keep talking directly with young carers through events like the Scottish Young Carer Festival. This will help us find out what support young carers are getting and where they need more support.



## Basic Health and Welfare

What we are doing to support the health and wellbeing of children across Scotland.

### The UN said...

Scotland should have a plan to make sure children and families have enough money for food and shelter.

### Scottish Government said...

We know that some families need extra help. We want to focus on them to make sure they get what they need. We are learning more about what makes it hard for these families so that we can support them.

## Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan

Some of the things we're doing include giving extra money to families on low incomes. We do this through our Scottish Child Payment. We also give extra money for housing costs for people who need it. We are also giving extra money to disabled children and their families. We have also made a new rule to stop most rents from going up too much.

You can find out more about the action we are taking in our [tackling child poverty delivery plan](#).

### What's next?

We will keep looking at how to support families who need it most. We will do this in a few different ways. We will make new rules so that more families can receive help they need. We will also make the Scottish Child Payment more flexible so it is more helpful to families. We will also think about how the Child Disability Payment can be made better.





### **The UN said...**

Scotland should protect the environment and make the air cleaner for children.

### **Scottish Government said...**

We want Scotland to be a cleaner, healthier and happier place for everyone.

### **The National Bus Travel Concession scheme**

To make that happen we are spending a lot of money to build more walking and cycling paths. Some of this work is already done but we have 290 projects across Scotland.

We also started the National Free Bus Travel scheme in 2022. This lets children and young people under the age of 22 ride the bus for free. We want to help young people in Scotland to choose buses instead of cars that make a lot of noise and pollution.

### **What's next?**

The National Free Bus Travel scheme has been very successful so far with over 116 million journeys made through the scheme. We hope that by continuing this scheme, more young people in Scotland will choose to use public transport. This will make Scotland a cleaner, healthier, and happier place for everyone.



### **The UN said...**

Scotland should have a plan to make sure that people of all ages and backgrounds can get support for their mental health when they need it.

### **Scottish Government said...**

We believe that Mental Health is very important. Everyone should be able to get help when and where it's needed.

## **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

In June 2023, we published our new [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#). This explains how we plan to help the people of Scotland with their mental health. We want children and young people to be able to get help and support as early as possible. We also want children and young people to have support in their local community when they need it.

We have also published a plan which explains how we are going to make the changes we want to make. We know that everyone has different needs, so our plan talks about how we will help ethnic minorities, disabled people, and LGBTI people.

### **What's next?**

We are giving money to local authorities to help pay for community mental health services for children and young people. We are also making sure counsellors are available in secondary schools across Scotland. This will help children and young people with their mental health.

We are also giving money to the NHS to improve the mental health services we already have. This includes support for neurodivergent children and young people. It also includes help for young people experiencing eating disorders. We are also giving funding to [Beat](#), the UK's eating disorder charity. They help children and teenagers through self-help and peer support groups.



## Education, Leisure and Culture

What we are doing to support children's right to education, play, leisure, arts and culture.

### The UN said...

Scotland should make sure that children are not bullied in school.

### Scottish Government said...

No-one should be bullied or treated unfairly because of their age, race, gender, disabilities or for any other reason.

## Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying

We have a guide that tells adults how to help stop bullying. This guide is called 'Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People'. We are looking at this guide to find out how we can make it better. Earlier this year, Education Scotland did an inspection on how bullying is recorded. What they found will help us tackle bullying.

### What's next?

In 2024, we will keep looking at what it can do to make sure all children and young people are treated fairly. The "Respect for All" plan is being improved to make sure it has the best advice for how to deal with bullying. The improved plan should be ready later in 2024.



### The UN said...

Schools should be teaching children and young people about how to respect people's differences.

### Scottish Government said...

We want everyone to learn and have fun in school.

### The 'Anti-Racism in Education Programme (AREP)'

We have a programme that helps us to be kind and respectful to each other and celebrate our differences. It is called the 'Anti-Racism in Education Programme (AREP)'. It teaches us how racism affects people so that schools can make sure it stops happening.

We also have a guide for how teachers teach about racism called 'Breaking the Mould: Principles for an Anti-Racist Curriculum.' We worked with people who know a lot about racism to make this guide.

### What's next?

We want to make our schools fairer and kinder for everyone. We are working on lots of things to make sure that teachers, students and leaders are not racist or mean to each other. In May 2024, the First Minister will hold a big meeting with people who work in education. They will talk about how to stop racism in schools.

We are also making changes to our curriculum. We want to include more stories from different cultures and backgrounds.



## Special Protections

What we are doing to support children and young people who need special protection.

### The UN said...

Scotland should raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14.

### Scottish Government said...

We know that sometimes, young people do things that are against the law. These young people need help to learn from their mistakes.

## The Age of Criminal Responsibility Act

The Age of Criminal Responsibility Act says we have to look at the law and decide if we want to make changes. We need to decide if we should change the age at which children are held responsible for breaking the law or keep it the same.

We have a group of people who are helping with this. They want to make sure that whatever they decide, it is good for children and good for Scotland.

### What's next?

We will finish looking at the law by 16 December 2024. Then we will write a report to tell the Scottish Parliament what we think should happen by December 2025. We will tell them if we think it's a good idea to change the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland. We will explain why we think it is good or bad for children and for Scotland.



### **The UN said...**

Children forced to leave their home country and come to Scotland should be able to find jobs, go to school, stay healthy, and make friends.

### **Scottish Government said...**

We want to help people who have been forced to leave their home and decide to come to Scotland.

## **The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy**

We believe refugee children and their families should feel welcome and be part of our communities from the day they arrive here. They should be able to go to school, see a doctor, feel safe in their home and start to make new friends.

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy is our plan for how to make them feel welcome, safe, and happy. We are working with our partners at COSLA, Scottish Refugee Council and other organisations to make the New Scots plan better.

### **What's next?**

As part of making the New Scots strategy better we have been talking to refugees, people who are helping them, and experts who know a lot about them. This will help us make sure the plan is fair and respectful of everyone's rights and needs.





© Crown copyright 2024



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3) or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-83521-774-0 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, March 2024

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA  
PPDAS1388834 (03/24)

W W W . g o v . s c o t