

UN CONVENTION ON THE

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

A booklet on the UN
Convention on the
Rights of the Child



This is the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden's information about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adapted and translated for children who are fleeing. Thomas Hammarberg has written the original text. Lena Erika Falk at The Centre for Easy-to-Read has written the easy to read text. You can download the pamphlet from the Ombudsman for Children's website: www.barnombudsmannen.se Production: Barnombudsmannen Illustration and graphic design: Caroline Roberts

All children are entitled to their own human rights

What do you know about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR)? Learn more about the rules designed to protect the rights of the child.

The rights in the Children's Rights Convention are applicable to all children in all countries. It does not matter if you were born in the country, have moved there, or even if you have fled as a refugee. You have the same rights.

As a child you have your own particular human rights. In Sweden, you are regarded as a child until your 18th birthday.

This means that you have a right to protection and care. Additionally, it means that you have the right to be heard on matters concerning you and your life.

The UNCRC says every government must protect the child and to take responsibility to ensure that every child's rights are realised. The government promises to follow the rules of the Convention by signing it.

Many countries are poor. They do not have the money to make sure that their children really get their rights. The rules say that they should do whatever and everything they can.



Governments can also ask other countries for help. The rules say that countries must work together in cooperation with other countries on matters concerning child rights.

There are different kinds of human rights. There are several UN conventions on human rights.

One form of a right is that all people should be able to express their opinion and be involved in associations with others.

Another form of a right is that people should get enough to eat and be able to learn to read and write.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child contains both types of rights and are equally important.

Almost all countries have signed on

The work on the Convention on the Rights of the Child began in 1979. By 1989, the UNCRC was ready.

Since then, almost all countries of the world have signed the Convention. National governments have pledged to follow the rules in the UNCRC.

The UN has several different conventions concerning human rights. But no other convention has received so much support from countries of the world as the UNCRC.

Why? This is due to several things. More and more, people have read and seen in media how war, poverty and injustice cause suffering to children. Many associations have spoken to politicians and decision-makers in government about the vulnerable situations children are in.

Over time, more and more politicians have understood the importance of children's rights.

Important rules

The various rules in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are called Articles. There are a total of 54 Articles.

All rules are equally important. But a few Articles are more important to keep in mind.

The core principles are found in Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12.

When you read the other Articles, you should be mindful of what is contained in these Articles which form the guiding principles.

Article 2 deals with how the rules apply to all children.

All children are of equal worth. No child should be discriminated against, or treated worse for no good reason.

It doesn't matter what the colour of the child's skin is, or his/her parents ethnicity, if the child is a girl or a boy, what language the child speaks, the child's religious beliefs, if the child has a physical disability or impairment, or if the child is rich or poor.



Article 3 deals with focusing on the best interests of the child. Politicians, governmental authorities and courts should always consider what is best for the child when deciding on matters related to children.

The Article states that the child's best interests shall be the primary consideration. This means that sometimes there are other factors which are just as important when considering the rights of the child. But politicians must also be able to show that they have given due consideration to what is in the best interest of the child.

Article 6 deals with the child's right to life and personal development.

The right to life means that States must ensure that children will not be killed. This can mean, for example, that children are not killed in war, and that children receive health care and medicines when they are sick so they do not die of diseases. The right to personal development means that States will do what they can in order to ensure that the child has a good childhood.

Children need so many things to develop well. Growing up with a sense of security, love, sufficient food, healthcare, a home, and the chance to play and attend school; these are some but not all of what is required.

Article 12 deals with the child's right to express their opinion on things that directly relate to them. Adults should listen to the child.

Governmental authorities including the courts should ask the child for their opinion, and listen to the child when they are making decisions concerning the child.

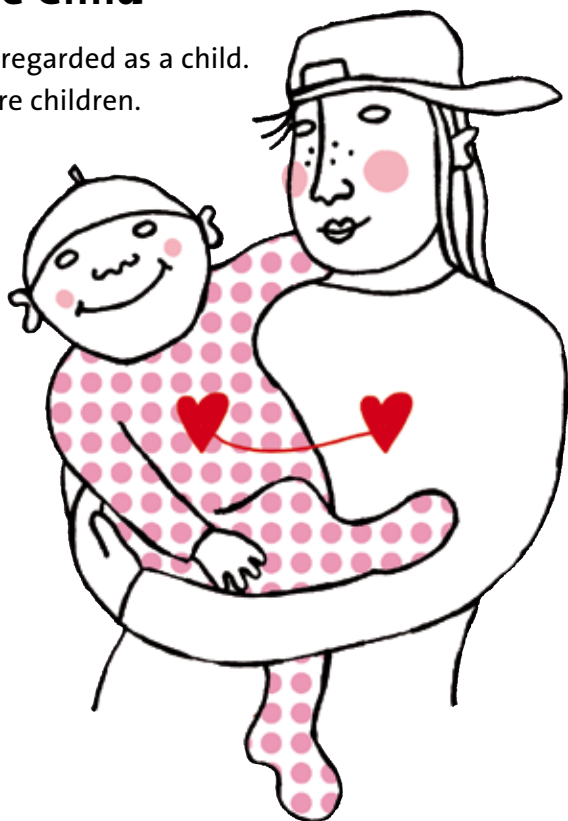
This may include teachers in schools asking children what they think before the teacher decides things.

Public officials in a municipality should ask children what they think before they make decisions about things that directly affect children.

The other articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 1 defines who is to be regarded as a child. All individuals under age 18 are children.

Article 4 is about what countries should do in order to comply with the principles in the Convention. Countries should amend their laws so that the laws are good for children. States should do all they can to implement the children's rights. Rich countries must help poor countries.



Article 5 deals with the need to have countries understand that it is the parents who have the primary responsibility for the child. Parents should assist so that their child is able to enjoy its rights.

Articles 7 and 8 deals with the right of all children to know who he or she is.

The child has the right to a name and to be a citizen of a country. The child also has the right to know who his or her parents are.

Article 9 deals with childrens' right to always be, whenever possible, with their parents.

If the parents divorce, the child has the right to see both their mom and dad. But sometimes it's best for the child not to live with their parents or to live with one of them.

Sometimes it is best for the child not to be with one of their parents or even both of them. This may be because the child is suffering from physical abuse, or because their parents are unable to take care of them.

Articles 10 and 11 are concerned with children and parents' right to visit each other even if they live in different countries. One parent may take the child with them if they move to another country, unless the other parent gives their consent. Countries must agree on how to help children and parents so that they can visit each other.

Articles 13, 14 and 15 concerns the child's right to say whatever he or she thinks.

The child has the right to think freely, to follow the religion they believe in, and to be involved in various associations.

Article 16 deals with the child's right to privacy.

This may mean for example that parents should not read their child's letters and diaries. It also concerns the child's ability to close a door and to be alone when the child goes to the WC at school.

Article 17 deals with the child's right to read good books and magazines, and to receive information in other ways, such as radio, television and via the Internet. States should have laws protecting children from films and texts which can harm the child.

Article 18 concerns the parents' duty to carry joint responsibility for the child.



Parents should always consider what is best for the child. Countries should make efforts to help the parents so that they can be better parents.

One good way to help the parents is to make sure that there are good preschool or daycare centres where children can stay when their parents are at work.

Article 19 deals with protecting children from violence in the home.

States must protect children against parents and other adults from hitting the child, being cruel to the child, or in any other manner caring poorly for the child.

This may relate to the parents abusing alcohol or drugs, or a parent exploiting the child sexually.

Articles 20 and 21 deals with children who cannot stay at home with their family.

States must ensure that the child is able to live with another family. Usually the best situation is if the child can live with relatives. There are times when a child is adopted by a family in another country.

Governmental authorities and courts that determine where children should live should always keep the best interests of the child in mind.

Article 22 deals with children who are refugees. Countries pledge to provide protection and assistance to the children who come to the country for asylum.

This applies to both unaccompanied minors and children who come with their parents.

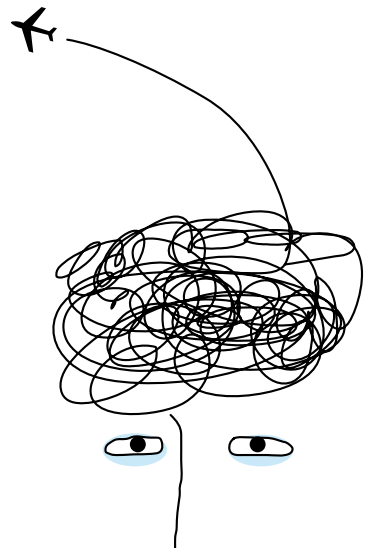
A separated child should be assisted in finding its parents.

If they cannot find their parents or other relatives, the child should receive the same protection and assistance as other children get when they cannot live with their parents.

Article 23 deals with children who have a physical disability. States must ensure that children with a physical impairment or other disability to the opportunity for a good life. Provisions must be made for children with disabilities to be able to attend school and participate in the community in general. The child and the child's family are to receive the assistance they need. The help should be free of charge or only a small cost so that people can afford to accept the help. Working together, countries will learn more about how to help children with physical disabilities in a good way. Rich countries must help poor countries.

Article 24 deals with the child's right to health care. The countries pledge to do all they can to ensure that children have good health. All children are entitled to receive care when they are sick. Women who are pregnant and mothers with new-born babies are to receive decent care. Parents should learn how to feed and care for their children. Rich countries must help poor countries.

Article 25 deals with children who are not living with their parents. The governmental authority which carries responsibility for the child must ensure that the child receives good care and treatment.



Articles 26 and 27 talks about the child's right to security. Families in need must receive help so that the child is well taken care of even if her or his parents are very poor, ill, or unemployed.

A parent who is not living with their child must also take responsibility for their child. This may mean paying so that the child has sufficient food, clothing and housing, and satisfies the other essential needs of the child.

Article 28 deals with the right of children to attend school and receive an education.

All children must attend primary school. There should not be any mandatory tuition fees. States must ensure that more children are able to attend upper secondary school and continue on to higher education.

Rich countries must help poor countries.

Article 29 deals with what the child should learn in school.

Every child should be allowed to develop as much as possible.

The child must be well prepared for life as an adult.

The child should learn about human rights, and that all people are of equal worth.

The child must also learn about the protection of nature and the environment.

Article 30 concerns children belonging to minority groups and/or indigenous peoples.

In Sweden, we have children who are Sámi, Finish-speaking Swedes, Tornedalians, Roma and Jewish. Members of each group have the right to their own language, culture and religion.

Article 31 deals with children having the right to play, rest, enjoy free time and recreational activities.

Article 32 concerns protecting children against dangerous work.

Article 33 concerns protecting children against illegal drugs.

Article 34 deals with the protection of the child from an adult forcing them into sex or that the child is forced to sell themselves sexually.

Article 35 and 36 is about protecting the child from being taken advantage of in any other way.

It could be that someone is selling a child for the child to work in a factory. It may be that someone takes a child from his or her parents to sell the child to another family.

But this is also a protection against any other ways of exploiting or abusing children that anyone might think of.

Article 37 is about protecting the child against the death penalty, life imprisonment and torture.

Torture is when an individual is tormented for the purpose of gaining information from them or getting them to say something.

When there is a lawsuit against a child, the child has the right to get help from a lawyer, meaning a person with knowledge of the laws. Children who are in prison should not be treated poorly.

Children should not be in the same prison as adults. Children who are in prison should be able to receive visits from their family and correspond with their family.

Article 38 says that children should not be compulsorily recruited into the military as soldiers.

Article 39 deals with countries having an obligation to help children who have been abused so that the child can feel good and live a normal life.

This also includes children who have been soldiers in a war.

Article 40 deals with children who are suspected of any crime. The countries pledge to treat the child well and to give the child a fair trial.

Article 41 says that countries are free to make efforts over and above what is in the Convention, into order to ensure that child rights are protected.

Article 42 deals with the countries' pledge to ensure that both children and adults become aware of the rules contained in the UNCRC.

Articles 43–54 contain rules concerning what countries need to do in order to comply with the UNCRC.



UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

In the UN Palace of Nations in the city of Geneva in Switzerland, there is a group of people who work to ensure that countries comply with the rules of the UNCRC.

This is the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. States are required to periodically provide reports concerning the implementation of the Convention and the status of child rights in their country to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Countries also promise that people in the country will have access to the reports in order to be able to discuss what is good and bad for the children in the country.

There are eighteen people working in the Committee on the Rights of the Child. They come from a variety of countries and all of them are experts concerning children. The experts read the reports from the individual countries.

Sometimes there are multiple reports from the same country. Non-governmental associations working for the rights of the child can make their own reports on how children are doing in the country.

Then the Committee on the Rights of the Child holds a meeting. Some people who work for the government of the country being discussed attend the meeting.

They can answer questions about what they have done for children in general, and what they intend to do to make it better.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is not a court. It cannot punish countries that fail to follow the rules of the Convention.

However the Committee on the Rights of the Child can provide suggestions on what countries can do to make it better. Sometimes, countries can get help from the UN or other countries.

The idea is that children should have their rights fulfilled.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child works in several complementary ways

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child may call a government of a country to a meeting at any time. This may occur if the UN learns that children are being very poorly treated in a particular country.

Sometimes even a child has written a letter to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and discussed what is going on.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child can arrange special sessions to discuss particular problems.

There have been meetings about children in war, children who have exceptionally hazardous jobs, the rights of girls, and the rights of children who use wheelchairs or have other physical disabilities.

Several countries have begun to be more focused on children's rights

Of course, not all countries comply with the rules of the Children's Rights Convention.

Some countries disregard many rules. In some poor countries,

kids have hazardous jobs. It is perhaps the case that girls and children with a physical impairment are not able to attend school.

Most countries find it difficult to comply with all of the rules. Sweden has also received criticism from the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

But public officials in many countries have started to think more about children's rights when they decide different things.

Several countries have recently adopted laws that try to make things better for children. In several countries, there are children's ombudsmen working to remind those in charge policy-making, to keep children's rights in mind.

In Sweden, there has been an Ombudsman for Children since 1993. Teachers and others who work with children learn about children's rights.

New associations have started working for the rights of the child. Aid agencies are thinking more about what is good for children as they help people in poorer countries.

Countries have mentioned these things in their reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Rights of the child in the future

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been in existence since 1989. Almost all countries of the world have committed to follow the rules contained in the Convention. Most countries have submitted reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Now is the time to make sure that the kids of the world get the rights enshrined in the Convention.

Therefore it is important that people know what rules are contained in the Convention. They can then begin to discuss how to make it better for children in Sweden and in other countries throughout the world.



Places you can turn to if you have questions about your rights

The Swedish Migration Agency is the governmental authority which receives the applications from people who want to come to Sweden and will investigate whether they have sufficient reasons for remaining here. They can answer questions about the asylum process.

Find contact information here:

<https://www.migrationsverket.se/en/contact-us.html>

Health and Social Care Inspectorate (IVO) is a governmental authority supervising children and adolescents who do not live with their family to check that they are doing ok. If things are not working out well in your accommodation, or with the social services you are in contact with, or your medical care, you can talk to them about this.

Find contact information here:

<https://www.ivo.se/kontakt/barn-ungdomslinjen/>

The Swedish School Inspectorate is a governmental authority that works to ensure that all students get a good education in a secure environment. They can answer questions about your right to an education. You can also file a complaint when something is not working as it should be in school.

Find contact information here:

<https://www.skolinspektionen.se/other-languages/english-engelska/>



Save the Children is a private organisation that supports children in vulnerable situations – In Sweden and in the world. They have offices for children and adolescents in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Umeå.

Find contact information here:

<https://www.raddabarnen.se/om-oss/kontakta-oss/>

Bris – Children's Rights in Society is a Swedish non-governmental organisation that provides support to vulnerable children and adolescents. Anyone under 18 can call and talk to a counselor if there is something that is bothering them or that they need help with. Callers remain anonymous, if they want.

Find contact information here:

<https://www.bris.se/>



ABOUT THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN IN SWEDEN

There are 2 million children and adolescents under 18 years old living in Sweden. Like everyone else in our society, their lives are impacted by the decisions of policy makers and civil servants.

In Sweden, all children and adolescents under 18 years old have an Ombudsman. The individual called the Children's Ombudsman is appointed by the government and is head of a government agency called the Ombudsman for Children.

There are 25 of us working at the Ombudsman for Children, all working on issues concerning the rights of children and adolescents. We investigate how the Children's Rights Convention is working out in the community, and inform people about it. The Ombudsman for Children makes recommendations concerning how laws and regulations in Sweden should be amended to conform to the UNCRC.

We at the Ombudsman for Children speak to children and adolescents in order to find out how they are doing and hear their opinions about different matters.