



Summary Report: State of Children's Rights 2022 Webinar Series

By Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

About the webinars

Together held a series of webinars in October 2022 which aimed to gather information about the state of children's rights in Scotland.

This information will help Together to write a report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child about what things are really like for children and families in Scotland. The UN Committee will then make recommendations to the UK and Scottish Government about how to improve things for children. These recommendations can help us to secure real change.

Prior to holding this webinar series, we launched a survey open to children, young people, parents, organisations and interested individuals. Responses highlighted that the following four areas were key areas of concern:

- Children's health and standard of living
- Children's right to an education
- Children being protected from harm
- Children whose rights are most at risk

Together was joined by expert speakers to deliver presentations on these areas of concern. Participants then split into breakout rooms where they could share some of their case studies, evidence and recommendations they would like the UN Committee to make to UK and Scottish Governments. These breakout rooms focused on a theme related to the key areas of concern and were facilitated by specialist organisations.

This document includes a summary of the presentations and a list of useful resources for each area of concern.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our reporting on the state of children's rights!

[Watch the webinar recordings here!](#)

Contents

<i>About UNCRC reporting</i>	3
<i>Webinar 1: Children’s health and standard of living.....</i>	4
<i>Webinar 2: Education reform.....</i>	6
<i>Webinar 3: Protecting children from harm.....</i>	8
<i>Webinar 4: Children whose rights are most at risk</i>	9

About UNCRC reporting

Maria Doyle, Legal & Policy Manager, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Access the slides from Maria's presentation [here](#).

Introduction to the UN reporting process

When the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee) reviews countries' children's rights record it takes the following steps:

- 1. The UN Committee sends a list of questions to the country under review on what it wants to know more information about.**
2. The UK state has a year to reply to these questions. Devolved governments can feed into this reply.
- 3. The UK delegates meets in Geneva with the UN Committee.**
4. The UN Committee publishes 'Concluding Observations' which are recommendations to the UK state from the UN Committee.
5. Follow-up period where the UK state is encouraged to implement the Committee's recommendations ahead of the next reporting cycle.

Organisation such as Together and its members can influence this process ahead of the stages highlighted in **bold**. The information drawn from these webinars will help to influence stage three of this reporting cycle.

What impact have we had in the past?

In 2016, Together's members raised a number of children's rights issues with a UN Committee member. The UN Committee later made 150 recommendations which were informed by the views of children, young people and Together's members across Scotland. These recommendations create a powerful advocacy tool and have led to changes such as the prohibition of physical punishment towards children.

How have we influenced the reporting cycle so far?

Together wrote a report raising 30 children's rights issues across Scotland. This has been used to influence the UN Committee's list of questions to the UK state. The UK Government has responded to this list of questions and Scottish Government is planning to respond soon.

Webinar 1: Children's health and standard of living

John Dickie, Director, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland

Access the slides from John's presentation [here](#).

John introduced Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG Scotland) which works to end child poverty in Scotland. CPAG Scotland raises awareness of child poverty and the impact it has, identifies evidence-based solutions, and supports families to access social security.

What is the scale of child poverty?

- Statistics collected before the Cost of Living Crisis and COVID-19 show one in four children are living in poverty across Scotland.
- Two-thirds of children living in poverty today come from households where at least one adult is working (at least part-time).
- Raising poverty levels is leaving families in an acute income crisis, exposed to soaring inflation and driven by cuts to wider family benefits and increasingly precarious employment.

What is the scale of poverty for families in the Cost of Living crisis?

- 30% higher energy bills in contrast to other households
- Families are at a greater risk of being pushed into poverty
- The average family of four will still need an additional £1,391 over the next six months to stay warm and fed despite the energy price guarantee.

Which children are most at risk of living in poverty?

Of the children who are affected by poverty:

- One in three are affected by a disability
- Two in five have a lone parent
- One-third come from a larger family of three plus
- One in three is from a family where the child is under the age of one
- Over half have a mum who is under the age of 25
- Two in five are from minority ethnic households

What impact does poverty have?

In contrast to high-income households, lowest-income households are:

- Almost four times more likely to have 'fair', 'bad; or 'very bad' health.
- Four times as likely to have poorer mental well-being.
- By the age of five, there is a gap of 10 months of developmental problem-solving and 13 months in vocabulary development.
- S2 pupils are twice as likely to perform less well in numeracy.

Beyond these statistics, children share their experiences of living in poverty and the impact this has:

“I’ve experienced it [bullying] personally because I wear the same shoes since P7... they say you must be poor, asking if I have enough money.”

“If all of your friends or people you know go to the afterschool clubs, school trips, that kind of isolates you from them. You’re singled out, you’re not with them, just a spare person.”

What progress has been made to address poverty?

- Between 1996-1997 and 2010-2011 there is 170,000 fewer children in poverty.
- There has been successful policy changes in child benefits, tax credits and employment support.

However, the last decade there has been huge cuts which has reversed this progress so the UK child poverty levels are expected to rise to 32% by 2026-2027.

What needs to happen to address poverty?

At a UK level:

- Uprate family benefits in line with inflation.
- End the benefit cap and two-child limit.

At a Scottish level:

- Scottish benefits need to at the very least hold value in real terms, including the £25 Scottish Child Payment.
- Ensure tackling child poverty at the heart of budgeting processes and of employment, childcare and housing policy.

Resources

- [Discover child poverty statistics in your area here](#)
- [Find out more about the Cost of Living Crisis with CPAG](#)
- [Look at CPAG Scotland’s top priorities](#)

Webinar 2: Education reform

Colin Morrison, Co-Director, Children's Parliament

This presentation looked whether Scotland is building an education system that is informed and directed by the purposes of education as those described in Article 29 of the UNCRC.

Colin introduced Children's Parliament's dream that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding.

What does Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child say about children's education?

- It should develop a child's personality, talents, and mental and physical health to its fullest potential.
- It should develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.
- It should develop respect for the child's parents, cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country which they originate from and the civilisations different from their own.
- It should prepare the child for a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all people, ethnic, national and religious groups, and persons of indigenous origin.
- It should develop the respect for the natural environment.

General Comment No. 1 sets out the aims of education

Together, SYP and Children's Parliament undertook a piece of work to consult with children and young people on education reform. This helped to inform Professor Ken Muir's investigation on the replacement of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the reform of Education Scotland. As a result of this consultation, over 5,000 children and young people shared their views.

What did children and young people aged 12 to 18 say about their education?

- Over 50% agreed or strongly agreed that education helps them develop their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential.
- Over 50% agreed that education helps develop respect for human rights and freedoms. Having said this, some children said:
"We get taught about them. But they could be acted on better"
"We were told we have to stay outside even during the cold. We are kicked out of toilets during breaks and lunch and can't go during the class. Sometimes teachers don't let people with a toilet pass go to the toilet."
- Around 50% said their education helps them to develop respect for their parents, carers, culture, identity and language.
- SYP Learner Panel reported that there were some opportunities to develop respect for other countries and people, but this often felt superficial and there was little time available to go into any depth.
- Nearly a third of children and young people said their education prepares them for a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace and tolerance.

- Over 50% said their education helps them to develop respect for the natural environment. However, this could be due to the amount of work organisations such as Children’s Parliament did with children and young people in the lead up to COP26, as one child said *“If COP26 hadn’t happened, we wouldn’t have learned about global warming.”*
- Over a third of children and young people were neutral towards the statement: *“My education helps me to develop respect for the national values of Scotland.”* It is likely that this was because many children and young people said they do not know what the values of Scotland are.
- Half of children said their education meets their needs as a learner.

What has happened as a result of this consultation with children, young people and adults? Professor Ken Muir made some recommendations for a renewed vision of Scotland’s education to be created.

A National Discussion has been launched on the 20th September and closes on the 5th December. Children, young people and adults are invited to share their thoughts in this discussion and use the toolkits created to hear from children and young people.

What else were attendees invited to do?

Become an Unfeartie! Unfearties stand with children to make rights real in day to say life!
[Sign up here!](#)

Resources

- [Share your thoughts in the National Discussion on education reform here.](#)
- [Information on the Education Reform process](#)
- [Dignity in Schools Hub by Children’s Parliament](#)
- [Become and Unfeartie](#)

Webinar 3: Protecting children from harm

Joe McGinty, Protecting Children Consultant, CELCIS

Access the slides from this presentation [here](#).

CELCIS is the go-to organisation for specialist knowledge concerning the care and protection of children in Scotland. Drawing from his knowledge and experience as a social worker, Joe explores how the UNCRC has and continues to inform rights-based developments in policy, practice and legislation across Scotland.

Rights-based policy, practice and legislation

Over the last 20 – 30 years, laws have evolved and been created to take a rights-based approach. For example, the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019 gives children the same protection adults have against physical abuse.

GIRFEC is underpinned by partnership working with families (UNCRC Article 18), children's voice and needs at the centre (UNCRC Article 12) and children's needs – wellbeing and development (UNCRC Article 6). These human rights should be considered and balanced against the need to protect children from violence and harm.

Is the landscape cluttered?

There are *lots* of policies, practices and legislation which protect children from harm. The Promise even coined it as a 'cluttered landscape'. This can make it harder for practitioners to understand what practice to follow and for children, young people and their families to understand what rights they have.

Therefore, to better implement these policies, practices and legislation the following is required:

- Resources
- Leadership
- Consistent practice
- Awareness of rights

Joe concludes that progress is being made, yet there is a need for continued attention on implementation of policy into practice.

Resources

- [Learn about the work of CELCIS here.](#)
- [Learn about The Promise Scotland here.](#)

Webinar 4: Children whose rights are most at risk

Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

In this webinar, Bruce talks about the benefits and drawbacks of labelling different children whose rights are most at risk. Bruce also touches upon children's and young people's experiences in the midst of a global pandemic and whether we truly were all in the same storm, or whether we were in different storms and different boats entirely!

[What human rights frameworks protect children and young people, and their rights?](#)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out lots of articles which pay particular attention to groups of children and young people whose rights are most at risk. In addition, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has created lots of General Comments which provide guidance to countries on how to deal with specific issues relevant to different groups. For example, General Comment 18 provides guidance on how to stop harmful practices on women and girls.

Other human rights frameworks exist too! Such as, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

[Why can categorising children and young people into groups be helpful?](#)

Categorising children and young people based on their characteristics and experiences can help adults identify which children are at risk of not being involved in decisions that affect them. It can help adults make an extra effort to prioritise budgeting decisions, allocate resources and support participation of these children and young people.

[What are the drawbacks of categorising children and young people?](#)

Everyone is different! By having a mix of characteristics and experiences, lots of children and young people can fall into different categories. It is important to realise human rights are universal whilst also recognising children and young people often have shared experiences, and participation efforts should not be tokenistic.

[COVID-19: Storms and boats](#)

In the midst of a global pandemic, children and young people may have been in the same storm, but many were not in the same boat. The impact of COVID-19 fell unevenly and unequally on society and thus, experienced differently.

CYPCS and Together supported the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland to conduct an Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the response to COVID-19 in Scotland. [This can be read here.](#)

Resources

- [Learn about the work of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland here.](#)
- [Learn about other international Treaties and Conventions that protect children and young people's rights here.](#)