

Children's Rights Manifesto 2026



Priorities from Together's membership to ensure children's rights are at the heart of the next Scottish Parliament

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About the Children’s Rights Manifesto

This manifesto brings together a selection of the calls made by Together’s members in their individual manifestos for the 2026 Scottish Parliament election. It is intended as a resource for political parties, candidates and policymakers to help ensure that children’s rights are reflected in party manifestos, parliamentary debate and policy development.

We have aimed to reflect members’ own wording wherever possible. In some places, similar calls have been combined or shortened so that the manifesto remains clear and accessible. You can read each member’s full manifesto through the links provided in Annex A. Annex B highlights where individual member manifestos include calls aligned with the priorities set out in each section.

Foreword

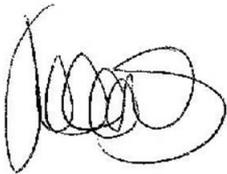
Scotland's incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2024 marked a historic first step – but it is also just the beginning. As our recent [State of Children's Rights Report](#) and [Rights on Track](#) campaign show, legislation alone cannot guarantee change. Real transformation happens in daily decisions, in systems that listen, and in approaches that place children's rights at their heart.

As we approach the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2026, this manifesto brings together priorities identified across Together's broad membership. It draws on members' election manifestos, their work alongside babies, children, young people and families, and their shared commitment to ensuring Scotland fully delivers on the recommendations made by the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023](#).

Some of the calls in this manifesto are for legislation. Others relate to policy, investment and practice. Taken together, they set out what our members believe is needed to ensure children's rights are realised in everyday decisions across Scotland.

As we look towards the next Scottish Parliament, we urge all parties and those standing for election to come together in the same cross-party spirit that secured incorporation of the UNCRC. Scotland now has an opportunity to build on that promise and ensure children's rights are at the heart of the next Parliament and Government.

Together's members are ready to work alongside elected representatives to make this happen. By working together, we can ensure that the commitment made to children through incorporation is realised in practice – and that Scotland continues its ambition to be the best place in the world for a child to grow up.



Juliet Harris, Director

About Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) is an alliance that works to improve the awareness, understanding and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other international human rights treaties across Scotland. We have over 640 members ranging from large international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through to small volunteer-led after school clubs and interested professionals. The Children's Rights Manifesto reflects shared priorities across the membership. However, it does not represent the full or detailed position of every individual organisation, and the inclusion of a member's logo does not imply endorsement of every call. Readers are encouraged to consider members' own manifestos alongside this collective summary.

Contributing members

We are deeply grateful to every Together member for their passion, expertise and commitment to making Scotland a place where every baby, child and young person grows up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding and has their rights realised.





Making children's rights real

In 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Scotland to fully implement the UNCRC, embed children's rights across decision making and introduce child rights budgeting.

Scotland has taken important steps since then, including the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, alongside commitments to wider human rights legislation and public finance reform. Scotland now needs strong children's rights infrastructure, investment and accountability mechanisms in place so that children's rights are realised in practice.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Address the implications of the [UK Supreme Court judgment](#) for the coverage of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act and future human rights legislation, ensuring that children's rights protections apply as widely as possible across devolved law.
- Introduce a Scottish Human Rights Bill that protects everyone's rights, with members making specific calls around environmental rights, the rights of girls and young women, and including Care Experienced people within the equality duty.
- Ensure that parents and carers are confident champions of their children's rights by increasing their understanding of the UNCRC.
- Make the legislative changes needed to align legislation and policy to tackle public debt
- Ensure sustainable, fair funding for the third sector and volunteering.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to the implementation and strengthening of children's rights infrastructure include the ALLIANCE, Civil Society Working Group, Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland, Human Rights Consortium Scotland, Parenting Across Scotland, Scottish Youth Parliament, UNICEF UK, Who Cares? Scotland and The Young Women's Movement.



Fairness, equality and being heard

In 2023, the UN Committee emphasised the need to eliminate discrimination, strengthen equality and ensure children can influence decisions that affect them.

While Scotland has made commitments to advancing children's participation and addressing inequalities, significant gaps remain in ensuring that children's views shape policy and services. Scotland now needs fairness, equality and meaningful participation embedded across public services.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Uphold children's right to participate in all decisions that affect them, with particular calls made in relation to education reform and national policymaking.
- Extend access to independent advocacy to all children covered by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, with sustainable funding, strategic planning and action to grow preventative models of independent advocacy.
- Use inclusive, accurate language that reflects the reality of parenting across all household types, including where children live across multiple households.
- Take action against racism and discrimination through development of policies and education.
- Tackle misogynistic and sexist views, attitudes and behaviours amongst young men and boys, including giving consideration to making misogyny a hate crime.
- Close the gender pay gap.
- Ensure equal opportunities for young women and girls to get involved in politics, democracy and decision-making processes.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to equality, non-discrimination and children's participation include Children in Scotland, Human Rights Consortium Scotland, Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, Scottish Youth Parliament, UNICEF UK and The Young Women's Movement.



Information, expression and privacy

In 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Scotland to ensure children have access to age-appropriate information, strengthen protection of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, prevent the use of mosquito devices, and ensure children are not threatened or penalised for engaging in climate activism.

Scotland has taken some steps to improve access to information and to recognise children's rights to expression, protest and belonging in public life. However, significant gaps remain in ensuring that children can exercise these rights fully and safely in practice. Scotland's children now need to be able to access information they can understand, exercise their rights and freedoms independently, and be protected from harms that undermine those rights.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Uphold children's right to access information by providing child-friendly versions of documents and reports.
- Address online safety for children by improving privacy, maintaining safety and regulating AI.
- Guarantee pupils an independent right to opt-out of Religious Observance in schools.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to children's civil rights and freedoms include Children First, NSPCC, Scottish Youth Parliament, Humanist Society Scotland and The Young Women's Movement. Similar calls are expressed in different ways across manifestos.



Protection from harm

In 2023, the UN Committee urged Scotland to strengthen protection from violence, exploitation, discrimination and online harm, with particular concern about gender-based violence.

Scotland has taken steps in relation to misogyny, digital safety and anti-bullying. However, children and young people continue to face violence and harm in their homes, schools, communities and online. Scotland now needs to strengthen prevention, protection and support so that all children can grow up safe from violence, abuse and harassment.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Tackle prejudice, discrimination and bullying across schools and communities.
- Ensure children are safe online, including through robust regulation of digital technologies and social media platforms. Members made specific calls about the need to address online violence against girls and young women.
- Prevent and eliminate violence against young women and girls, with long-term funding for specialist women's and youth organisations.
- Give children a childhood without alcohol advertising, restricting their access to and educating them about the dangers of alcohol.
- Safeguard LGBTQ+ young people from hate, domestic and familial abuse.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to protection from violence and harm include Action for Children, Alcohol Focus Scotland, Children First, Girlguiding Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland, NSPCC and The Young Women's Movement. Similar calls are expressed in different ways across manifestos.



Family support and care

In 2023, the UN Committee called for stronger support for children, parents and carers, including improved access to childcare, better support for young carers, and support to maintain contact with a parent in prison. It also made extensive recommendations on the rights of Care Experienced children, including stronger family support, access to independent advocacy, specialist mental health provision and a stronger role for children in decision making.

Scotland has made important commitments through The Promise, the National Carers Strategy and related policy work. However, too many children and families still face barriers to getting the support they need, when they need it. Scotland now needs strengthened support for families, parents, carers and Care Experienced children, and policy commitments that are matched by delivery, investment and accountability.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Ensure long-term emotional, financial and practical support for families through universal and intensive whole-family support services, including specific calls for Open Kindergartens.
- Develop a renewed Parenting Strategy for Scotland that centres children's, parents' and carers' views and experiences.
- Improve employment opportunities for parents, alongside improving flexible work for parents.
- Remove embedded disincentives to shared parenting and keep families in recovery together wherever possible.
- Ensure that The Promise is kept in full, including specific calls to fully resource delivery beyond 2030; support and value carers; reform and invest in the wider care system so it meets the needs of care experienced children, young people and families; guarantee access to trauma-informed mental and physical health support.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to family support and care experience include Action for Children, the ALLIANCE, Carers Trust Scotland, Children First, End Child Poverty, Parenting Across Scotland, Shared Parenting Scotland, The Fostering Network and Who Cares? Scotland. Similar calls are expressed in different ways across manifestos.



Health, standard of living and the environment

In 2023, the UN Committee urged Scotland to take urgent action to tackle child poverty. It also called for accessible mental health care, shorter waiting times, stronger support for disabled children, better participation in decision making, and action to protect the environment.

Scotland has taken important steps in some of these areas, including through measures to tackle child poverty such as the Scottish Child Payment, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and wider commitments on environmental protection. However, many children still face unacceptable barriers to healthcare, support and a healthy environment. Scotland now needs to ensure that children's health, wellbeing and standard of living are prioritised in practice, with services and systems designed around children's rights, needs and experiences.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Prioritise tackling child poverty by further increasing the Scottish Child Payment and investing in social housing to guarantee every child and their family has a safe, secure and affordable home.
- Make the legislative changes needed to align legislation and policy to tackle public debt
- Reduce waiting times and ensure child-friendly healthcare environments, supported by a sustainable child health workforce trained in children's rights and trauma-informed practice.
- Strengthen children's healthcare services, including dental care, through specialised training and inclusive, trauma-informed provision.
- Ensure children can participate in decisions about their healthcare through accessible information and policies that recognise and support their right to play in healthcare settings.
- Ensure all children have access to adequate and appropriate mental healthcare.
- Address inequalities in health outcomes by improving access for girls and young women, supporting gender-affirming care, and strengthening protections for disabled children.
- Recognise loneliness as a public health priority and invest in preventative action.
- Ensure fair access to environmental justice, including embedding environmental rights in law, taking bold action on the climate crisis and protecting Scottish water from pollution.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to children's health and wellbeing include the ALLIANCE, Befriending Networks, Children's Health Scotland, RCPCH and The Young Women's Movement. Similar calls are expressed in different ways across manifestos.



Education, learning and play

In 2023, the UN Committee called for inclusive education, including in the early years, and for all children and young people to have their rights to play, rest and leisure upheld.

Scotland continues to pursue education reform and has committed to creating an environment in which all children and young people can enjoy learning and leisure. However, many children still face barriers to inclusion, support, participation and access. Scotland now needs to ensure that education, play, leisure and community life are shaped by children's rights and genuinely accessible to all.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Invest in early learning and childcare, valuing and resourcing the workforce.
- Increase investment in specialist provision for children with additional support needs and deliver a renewed Additional Support for Learning Action Plan.
- Reform the curriculum and assessment to better reflect children's rights.
- Ensure safe and inclusive learning environments for girls.
- Remove financial barriers to learning, including guaranteeing free school meals for all pupils from primary through secondary school.
- Provide financial education and remove barriers to further and higher education.
- Create youth-specific spaces in local communities and establish a legal right to youth work for all children and young people.
- Invest in a national hobby framework so that every child can take part in a hobby of their choice.
- Ensure accessible and affordable sports and leisure facilities.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to education, play, leisure and youth opportunities include Aberlour Children's Charity, Child Poverty Action Group Scotland, Children in Scotland, Girlguiding Scotland, Parenting Across Scotland, Scottish Youth Parliament and YouthLink Scotland. Similar calls are expressed in different ways across manifestos.



Justice, protection and asylum

In 2023, the UN Committee recommended that Scotland further increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility, strengthen child-friendly justice and ensure timely, trauma-informed processes.

Scotland has taken forward relevant reviews, is progressing the Bairns' Hoose model and has indicated that it may consult further on the age of criminal responsibility. However, children still face significant barriers in accessing justice, protection and support. Scotland now needs to strengthen child-friendly justice, remove barriers to redress and ensure that legal and justice systems uphold children's rights in practice.

Together members are calling for the next Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to:

- Deliver a consistent, fully resourced Bairns' Hoose to put children's recovery at the centre of the justice system.
- Remove barriers to justice by creating a strong, well-funded legal aid system.
- Reduce delays between reporting crimes and prosecution, so victims can access justice without significant delay.
- Increase the minimum age for criminal responsibility further.
- Reform family courts and professional practice to centre children's rights.
- Ensure fair and humane treatment of migrant and asylum-seeking children and young people.
- Ensure all Scottish authorities meet their duties towards unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and consider under 18's as 'looked after' under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.
- Ensure that all refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people have a right to reunite with their families in the UK.

Members whose election manifestos include calls relating to justice, advocacy and special protection measures include Children First, Civil Society Working Group, Human Rights Consortium Scotland, Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, Scottish Refugee Council and Who Cares? Scotland. Similar calls are expressed in different ways across manifestos.

Annex A – Links to member manifestos

An overview of all the manifestos: [Children’s Rights Manifesto | Together Scotland](#)

Aberlour Children’s Charity: <https://aberlour-web-admin.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/docs/Scottish%20Elections%20Manifesto%202026.pdf>

Action for Children: https://media.actionforchildren.org.uk/documents/AfC_Scotland_manifesto_pdf.pdf

Alcohol Focus Scotland: [AFS Manifesto 2026 \(Booklets\)](#)

Befriending Networks (hosting the Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness): <https://befriending.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Social-Connection-Manifesto-screen-3.pdf>

Carers Trust Scotland: <https://carers.org/policy-and-strategic-influencing-in-scotland/2026-carers-manifesto-a-supporting-unpaid-carers-and-young-carers>

Children First: <https://www.childrenfirst.org.uk/media/4r3p44uh/manifesto-2025.pdf>

Children’s Health Scotland: <https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/251120-CHS-A2-manifesto-poster-FINAL.pdf>

Children in Scotland: <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/316043772/4-5/>

Child Poverty Action Group Scotland: <https://cpag.org.uk/education/working-with-young-people/school-shouldnt-cost-young-peoples-poverty-and-education-manifesto-2026-31>

Civil Society Working Group: <https://www.hrcscotland.org/news/news/civil-society-working-group-2026-manifesto-a-call-for-human-rights-action/>

End Child Poverty: [Microsoft Word - End Child Poverty - 2026 Election Manifesto FINAL](#)

Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland: https://www.ercs.scot/wp/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/ERCS-Advocacy-Manifesto_Sep25.pdf

Girlguiding Scotland: <https://www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk/girls-taking-action/girls-speak-out/#speak-out>

Guardianship Scotland: https://aberlour-web-admin.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/docs/Protecting%20the%20Rights%20of%20Unaccompanied%20asylum%20seeking%20children_briefing%20doc.pdf

Humanist Society Scotland: https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/media/rd4pyhjj/religious-observance-in-schools_our-key-asks-of-the-next-scottish-government-2026-2031.pdf

Human Rights Consortium Scotland: <https://www.hrcscotland.org/file-download/392/our-rights.-your-move.-manifesto-briefing-document-1-1758026725.pdf>

LGBT Youth Scotland: <https://lgbyouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/LGBTYS-Manifesto-final-doc-digital-pdf.pdf>

NSPCC Scotland: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/about-us/what-we-do/voices-of-online-youth/voice-of-online-youth_manifesto_eng_aw.pdf

Parenting Across Scotland: <https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/news-views/posts/pas-manifesto-2026>

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH):
<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/Prescription-for-change-Scotland-manifesto-2026.pdf>

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance: <https://www.siaa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Independent-Advocacy-2026-Manifesto-SIAA.pdf>

Scottish Refugee Council: [Protecting the Rights of Unaccompanied asylum seeking children_briefing doc.pdf](#)

Scottish Youth Parliament: <https://syp.org.uk/manifesto/>

Shared Parenting Scotland: <https://www.sharedparenting.scot/2026-scottish-election-what-were-calling-for-from-politicians/>

The Fostering Network: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/media/cyihx5gu/tfn-scottish-manifesto-2025.pdf>

UNICEF UK: https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Scotland-Manifesto_Final.pdf

Who Cares? Scotland: <https://www.whocarescotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Connected-by-Care-Scotland-Manifesto.pdf>

Young Women's Movement: <https://youngwomenscot.org/our-programmes/young-women-demand/>

YouthLink Scotland: <https://www.youthlink.scot/news/police-business-and-youth-leaders-support-new-manifesto/>

Annex B – Alignment of members’ calls

The table below highlights where individual member manifestos include calls aligned with the themes set out in this manifesto.

Member	Making children’s rights real	Fairness, equality and being heard	Information, expression and privacy	Protection from harm	Family support and care	Health, standard of living and environment	Education, learning and play	Justice, protection and asylum
Aberlour Children’s Charity	●				●	●	●	
Action for Children				●	●	●		
Alcohol Focus Scotland				●		●		
The ALLIANCE	●	●			●	●		
Befriending Networks (hosting the Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness)						●		
Carers Trust Scotland					●			
Child Poverty Action Group						●	●	
Children First	●		●	●	●			●
Children in Scotland	●	●				●	●	
Children’s Health Scotland						●		
Civil Society Working Group	●							●
End Child Poverty					●	●	●	
Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland	●					●		

Girlguiding Scotland		●		●			●	
Guardianship Scotland				●				●
Humanist Society Scotland		●	●				●	
Human Rights Consortium Scotland	●	●						●
LGBT Youth Scotland		●		●				
NSPCC Scotland			●	●				
Parenting Across Scotland	●				●		●	
RCPCH						●		
Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance		●						●
Scottish Refugee Council		●		●			●	●
Scottish Youth Parliament	●	●	●				●	
Shared Parenting Scotland					●			
Fostering Network					●			
UNICEF UK	●	●	●					
Who Cares? Scotland	●				●			●
Young Women's Movement	●	●	●	●		●	●	
YouthLink Scotland		●					●	

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