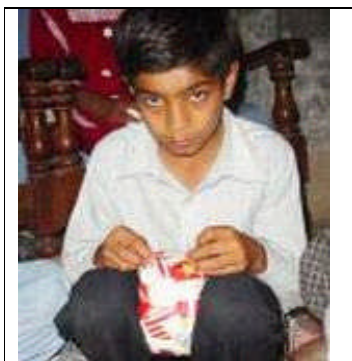


CHILD RIGHTS

Are child rights the same as human rights?

Human rights apply to all age groups and children have the same human rights as adults. However, because children are dependent on adults for so much, they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. So they have rights that recognise their special need for protection.

All adults, not just parents, have legal and moral responsibilities for children, and that is why many countries, including Australia, have laws which protect them. Sadly, the rights of many children are abused.



Nine year old Balal in Pakistan works long hours stitching soccer balls for the international market. Many children like Balal suffer permanent injuries from ongoing finger, back and neck strain.
Credit: ILO/IPEC

Why is a declaration of child rights needed?

The abuse of children's rights happens in both rich and poor countries, but children who live in poverty and conflict are always the most vulnerable. Extreme poverty means that many families are struggling simply to survive, and lack the money and sometimes health to meet even their most basic needs.

Adding to the problem is the fact that children in poor countries usually don't even know their rights, let alone have the power to demand them. In communities where poverty and unemployment are widespread, criminals like traffickers lure, trick or abduct children into child labour and sexual exploitation as a way out of economic hardship.

An estimated 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. Around 10 million children, mainly girls, are sexually exploited. Because of this extreme vulnerability, the United Nations (UN) created the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The convention is supported by all 193 members of the UN, and most have made it law in their own countries. Only Somalia and the United States have not done so. The convention is the most widely accepted human rights document ever produced. Although there is a long way to go before every child on the planet can be certain of their rights, the acknowledgment that children even have these rights is a big step.

The convention spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child.

For an outline of the convention visit www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf

What's being done about the abuse of child rights?

The global community is tackling the abuse of child rights with a three-pronged approach – Prevention, Protection and Prosecution.

1. **Prevention** is about raising awareness of rights with both adults and children, and creating networks of people and groups that speak and act on child rights. Development programs to help families generate income are also vital. Overcoming poverty is central to protecting child rights.
2. **Protection** means ensuring that the law enforcement and court systems within a community are accountable for upholding child rights. Protection includes providing community services to high risk families, street children and the victims of trafficking.
3. **Prosecution** signals that child rights are taken seriously. It involves the training of law enforcers and judges, the provision of legal representation for child victims, and working with human rights organisations.

Children make a stand

Many children are learning that they have rights and are making sure their communities know them too. The great thing is these children will grow up to be aware and responsible adults.

One way this is happening is through child parliaments, where children between the ages of 13 and 16 are arguing for change. Child parliaments operate in many areas of the world and are overseen by adult staff, and taken very seriously by the young people.

For example, Fuluzimange is a Year 12 student and a member of the Children's Parliament in Malawi. "Child labour and early marriage is a big problem here and I would like to see it end so that all children can go to school, be educated and become future leaders. Even when I have finished school, I would like to be a parliamentarian because I can see that my people need a lot more help than I can provide at the moment."

Fuluzimange understands that with rights come responsibilities – the responsibility to use knowledge to protect and work for the rights of others.

For you to do

1. Why is there a special need to recognise the Rights of the Child?

2. Why does poverty make children more vulnerable to abuse?
