



ENGLISH

Everyone,  
including children,  
is entitled to human rights.

Children are persons below the age of 18 years.

**Do you know about  
the rights of the child?**



LAPSIASIAVALTUUTETTU  
OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN



## What does the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child mean?

The United Nations (UN) concluded a Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The Convention entered into force in Finland in 1991. Nearly every nation in the world is party to the Convention. The Finnish State must ensure that the issues set out in the Convention are implemented in children's lives. The Finnish State is also required to make information on children's rights available to adults and children alike and regularly report to the UN on how the rights and wellbeing of children have developed in Finland.

The Ombudsman for Children assesses and promotes the implementation of children's rights in Finland. The Finnish Parliament established the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in 2005.

### The Ombudsman for Children...

- finds out children's opinions and passes them on to adults.
- ascertains how children are doing and how their rights are being enacted.
- provides children and adults with information about the human rights of children.
- influences decision-makers with a view to improving issues concerning children.
- collaborates with actors in the child welfare sector.

“Children should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

### All children are equal

The age, skin colour, language, property, religion, disability or illness of a child or the parents does not affect the rights of the child. No one may be discriminated against or bullied.

### Every child is entitled to a good life

Every child is entitled to be themselves. Adults should support children's opportunities to grow and develop in peace and at their own pace.

### Adults should find out what children think about matters

Adults should ask for and listen to children's opinions and take them seriously. Children must be given the opportunity to have a say in their day-to-day lives.

### Children's best interests must be prioritised when deciding on children's issues

Parents and the authorities must always consider how their decisions will affect children. Adults should seek solutions that are in children's best interests. Reasons for decisions should be explained to children in a manner that they can understand.



## The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child consists of a total of 54 articles.

These cover matters to which State and municipal decision-makers, as well as all adults, should be responsible.

1. Every person below the age of 18 years is a child.
2. Every child is entitled to the rights of the child equally. A child must not be discriminated against for any reason.
3. Adults make many decisions that affect the lives of children. They must always ascertain what is best for the child.
4. The State must ensure that this Convention is implemented in children's lives. Children are entitled to all the rights set out in this Convention.
5. Parents have the right and the duty to guide and instruct the child in the rights due to the child under this Convention. The State should respect this parental right.
6. Children have the right to life. The State must ensure that children grow and develop in the best possible conditions.
7. Children have the right to a name immediately after birth. Children have the right to a homeland and to be a citizen of that country. All the children have the right to know their parents and be cared for by them if possible.
8. Children have the right to retain their own name and nationality. Children have the right to know their relatives.
9. Children have the right to live with their parents if the parents are able to care for them. If children live away from their parents, the children shall have the right to maintain contact with their parents sufficiently often. If contact is harmful to the child, the authorities may prevent it.
10. Children sometimes end up living in a different country to their parent or parents. The State must then try to reunite them as soon as possible.
11. The State must prevent adults from moving children from one country to another without permission.
12. Children have the right to have their say in matters that concern them. Adults must ascertain children's opinion before they make decisions concerning them. Children's opinions should be considered in respect of their age and development when making decisions about them. Adults must justify decisions to children in a manner that they can understand.
13. Children have the right to freely express their opinions. They may not, however, offend other people.
14. Children have the right to think freely. Children have the right to belong or not to belong to a religion. Parents have the right and the duty to advise and guide children in the exercising of this right.



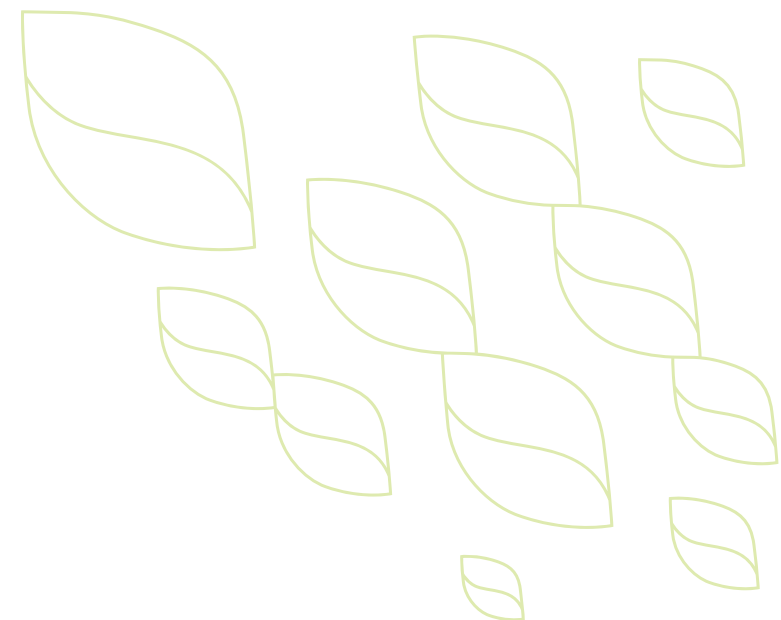
15. Children have the right to join associations and attend their meetings.
16. Children have the right to privacy. A child's honour or reputation must not be belittled or violated. Information concerning a child may not be distributed without permission to outsiders. No outsider may enter a child's home without permission. When children receive mail addressed to them, only they are allowed to open it.
17. Children have the right to obtain information and to follow mass media in its various forms. Adults must protect children from information that may harm them.



18. Parents have joint responsibility for a child's upbringing and care. They must act for the child's best. The State and municipalities must support parents in this task.
19. Adults must protect children from all forms of violence and ill-treatment. Children may not be hurt in any way. No one may treat a child with negligence or abuse a child.
20. Children have the right to receive help if their parents do not take care of or mistreat them. In such a case, a child may live, for example, with another family or in a child welfare institution. Children may return to their parents if this is in the best interests of the children. Multiple changes in a child's place of residence and home should be avoided. Children have the right to maintain relationships with the people who are important to them.
21. If the parents of a child die or are unable to care for the child, the child may obtain a new permanent family. This is called adoption.
22. Children who enter Finland as refugees from another country are entitled to the care they require.
23. A child with disabilities is entitled to receive the best possible care and assistance such that this enhances the child's sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and their ability to live a full and good life as a member of society. Children with disabilities must be supported so that they can participate at school and in hobbies.
24. Children have the right to live as healthy a life as possible. Children have the right to

receive care and assistance if they become ill. Children have the right to access a doctor. The health of expectant mothers should also be taken care of.

25. If children cannot live with their parents, other adults must provide them with good care. Child welfare workers should periodically review whether to continue the child's placement outside the home.
26. Children and their parents are entitled to receive State and municipal assistance in financial matters.
27. Children are entitled to have a home, food, and adequate clothing. The State and the municipalities must assist parents in providing conditions favourable in all respects for a child's growth and development.



28. Children have the right to attend school. Primary education must be free. School discipline must be reasonable and fair. The State must ensure that all children complete primary education. The State must offer as many children as possible the opportunity to continue studying after completing primary education.
29. School must develop a child's skills. It must develop a child's native language and provide information about the cultures of a child's own and other countries. Schools should provide information about the rights of children and other people. Children learn at school what multiculturalism, environmental protection, and gender equality mean.
30. Children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group have the right to their own culture, religion and language.
31. Children have the right to rest, play, and leisure. Children have the right to learn about the arts and culture.
32. Children must not be given work that damages their health or is detrimental to their education.
33. Adults must protect children from drugs.
34. Adults must protect children from sexual harassment. No one may entice or coerce a child into sex.
35. States must prevent the trafficking of children. Child trafficking means that someone abducts a child or children from their parents and sells the child or children to another person or persons. Child trafficking is a crime.

36. Adults must protect children from all forms of mistreatment.
37. Children shall not be punished cruelly or tortured. No one may undermine the rights of a child. Children shall not be imprisoned if other alternatives are available. If, however, children are imprisoned, they must be treated well and taken care of there. A child must not be in prison for long.
38. Children must not be taken into an army or to war. Adults must protect children in war.



39. The State must help children if they have been mistreated.
40. Even if children have or are suspected to have broken the law, they must be treated well and fairly.
41. The laws of a State may be better for the child than this Convention. In that case, people must comply with the laws of their country.
42. The State must ensure that all of its inhabitants know what the rights of the child are.
43. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors that states and their inhabitants comply with this Convention.
44. -54. These articles indicate how long the Convention is valid for and how states comply with the Convention.



## Key terms

**The United Nations**, or **the UN**, desires peace throughout the world. It helps all countries to co-operate in order to realise human rights. Every state in the world is a member of the UN.

In Finland, the **State** and the **municipalities** provide services for people. The citizens of Finland constitute the State. The affairs of state are decided by the Finnish Parliament. Every resident in Finland lives in a municipality. Local affairs are decided by the municipal councils. Education and health care, for example, are paid for through taxes.

The **authorities** mean adults who are employed by the State or a municipality. They work, for example, in child welfare, schools, the police force or in hospitals.

**Actors in the child welfare sector** include, for example, organisations and research institutes as well as authorities who decide matters concerning children.

A **service** means, for example, that children have access to a doctor if they become ill. School and day-care services are also services for children.

A **child welfare institution** means a place where children can live if they are unable to live with their parents. A child welfare institution is home to many children at the same time.

A **foster family** means another family who takes care of a child. Children can be moved to foster families if their own parents cannot take care of them. Children can then return to their parents if it is in the best interests of the children to do so.

**Adoption** means that a child moves permanently to another family and receives new parents. The child no longer returns to the birth parents.

**Minority groups** mean people whose language, culture, religion or other characteristic is different from the majority of the country's population. In Finland, language minority groups include, for example, Romani people, the Swedish-speaking population, and sign language users, as well as many immigrants. The Sami are a minority and an indigenous people. They are the original inhabitants of Finland.

## Do children have obligations?

Everyone is entitled to human rights without conditions. It is the duty of everyone to respect the human rights of others. It is the responsibility of adults to teach children what human rights mean.

Examples:

- A child is entitled to protection from violence, abuse, and neglect. A child may not bully or harm others in any way.
- A child is entitled to a clean environment. Moreover, children have a responsibility to ensure the cleanliness of the environment to the best of their ability.
- A child has the freedom to hold his or her own opinion and to practise his or her culture and religion. A child also has the duty to respect other people's views and religious principles.



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Office of the Ombudsman for Children  
Published online 10/2020