

# Convention on the Rights of the Child FAQ

[www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/frequently-asked-questions](http://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/frequently-asked-questions)

## **What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty that recognizes the human rights of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18 years. The Convention establishes in international law that States Parties must ensure that all children – without discrimination in any form – benefit from special protection measures and assistance; have access to services such as education and health care; can develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential; grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and are informed about and participate in, achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner.

## **How does the Convention on the Rights of the Child protect children's rights?**

The Convention defines a “child” as a person below the age of 18, unless the relevant laws recognize an earlier age of majority. On some issues, States are obliged to provide for minimum ages, such as the age for admission into employment and completion of compulsory education; but in other cases the Convention is unequivocal in prohibiting life imprisonment without possibility of release or capital punishment for those under 18 years of age.

## **What are the Convention's guiding principles?**

The guiding principles of the Convention are: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children; the child's inherent right to life, and State Parties' obligation to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child; and the child's right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting the child, with those views being given due weight.

## **What is the vision of the child in the Convention on the Rights of the Child?**

The Convention provides a universal set of standards to be adhered to by all countries. It reflects a new vision of the child. Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and are the subject of their own rights. The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and a member of a family and a community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. Recognizing children's rights in this way firmly sets a focus on the whole child.

## **How is the Convention on the Rights of the Child special?**

The Convention:

- Is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history – in force in virtually all countries of the world, thus providing a common ethical and legal framework for the realization of children's rights.
- Was the first time a formal commitment was made to ensure the realization of child rights and monitor progress on the situation of children.
- Indicates that children's rights can no longer be perceived as an option, as a question of favor or kindness to children or as an expression of charity. Children's rights generate obligations and responsibilities that we all must honor and respect.
- Has been recognized by non-state entities.
- Is a reference for many organizations working with and for children – including NGOs, and entities within the UN system.
- Reaffirms that all rights are equally important and essential for the full development of a child and that each and every child is important.

- Reaffirms the notion of State accountability for the realization of human rights and the values of transparency and public scrutiny that are associated with it.
- Promotes an international system of solidarity designed to achieve the realization of children's rights. Donor countries are called upon to provide assistance in areas where particular needs have been identified; recipient countries are called upon to direct overseas development assistance to that end too.
- Highlights the role of society, communities and families to promote and protect children's rights.

### **How many countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child?**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most rapidly ratified human rights treaty in history. More countries have ratified the Convention than any other human rights treaty in history – 196 countries have become State Parties to the Convention as of October 2015. Only the United States of America has not ratified the Convention. By signing the Convention, the United States has signaled its intention to ratify, but has yet to do so.

### **How does the international community monitor and support progress on the implementation of the Convention?**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, an elected body of independent experts that monitors the Convention's implementation, requires governments that have ratified the Convention to submit regular reports on the status of children's rights in their countries. The Committee reviews these reports and makes recommendations to States. Where necessary, the Committee calls for international assistance from other governments and technical assistance from organizations like UNICEF.

### **What steps do the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of the Child encourage governments to undertake?**

Through its reviews of country reports, the Committee urges all levels of government to use the Convention as a guide in policy-making and implementation, including: having a national plan for children, monitoring how much of the budget is spent on children, conducting regular impact assessments throughout every government department using reliable data about children's lives, and having an independent children's ombudsman.

### **What are some of the areas in which the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been most effective?**

In the 30 years since the adoption of the Convention, the lives of millions of children have been improved through the progressive realization of rights and fulfillment of obligations enshrined within the Convention and its three Optional Protocols.

The Convention has inspired changes in all parts of the world, including:

- Incorporating child rights principles into legislation
- Establishing interdepartmental and multidisciplinary bodies to address child rights
- Developing national agendas for children
- Promoting ombudspersons for children or commissioners for children's rights
- Restructuring of budgetary allocations for the realization of children's rights
- Interventions targeting child survival and development
- Addressing discrimination and other barriers to the realization of child rights including socio-economic disparities among children
- Creating opportunities for children to express their views and be heard
- Expanding partnerships for children
- Assessing the impact of measures on children.