

New Zealand's Fifth Periodic Report under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Summary

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) is a treaty that guarantees basic civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights to the world's children.

New Zealand must send regular reports to the United Nations to let them know how well we are doing under UNCROC. In particular we have to comment on how the Government:

- organises itself to put UNCROC into practice
- upholds the general principles of UNCROC
- further enhances civil rights and freedoms for children
- supports families to take care of their children
- keeps children healthy
- supports children to achieve in education
- provides special protection measures for vulnerable children.

We also need to update the United Nations on progress under the Optional Protocols to UNCROC, and whether the Government is planning to sign and ratify any other international human rights treaties.

Our next report is due on 5 May 2015. We have drafted the report and now we want to hear your opinion on the Government's progress under UNCROC. The following is a summary of the report. For the full report, go the Ministry of Social Development's website.

The Government has done a lot to make life better for children and young people in New Zealand over the past four years. The Government has focused on getting better results for:

- children and families who need extra support to make their home safe
- children who need help to stay in school
- young people who need support to get into training or find a job
- young people who get into trouble with the law
- parents who need support to help their children get the best start in life.

How does the Government organise itself to put UNCROC into practice?

The Social Sector Forum Deputy Chief Executives is the group which directs UNCROC action.¹ This group meets with the UNCROC Monitoring Group² twice a year to discuss UNCROC related issues.

¹ The Social Sector Forum Deputy Chief Executives consists of the Chair and Deputy Chief Executives from the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, New Zealand Police, the Department of Corrections, Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Housing New Zealand Corporation.

The Government has 10 Better Public Service (BPS) targets. Five of these targets aim to make life better for children and young people in New Zealand. There is also a Children's Action Plan which is the Government's plan for protecting vulnerable children. Different areas of government, such as health, education and justice, also have their own strategies and plans for children. Together these actions show the Government's national direction for children.

New Zealand has three reservations³ to UNCROC in the areas of access to services for children unlawfully in New Zealand (article 2), a minimum age for employment (article 32(2)), and age-mixing in places of detention (article 37(c)). The United Nations would like New Zealand to withdraw these reservations. The Government thinks it has sufficient protections in place for children in these areas and continues to work towards meeting the requirements of UNCROC.

The Government is also responsible for supporting and working with Tokelau to ensure the children of Tokelau enjoy the rights and protections of UNCROC. New Zealand supports other countries to make life better for children by providing overseas development assistance.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***general measures of implementation*** in the questionnaire).

How does the Government protect children from discrimination and ensure that children's opinions are heard?

Tamariki Māori often experience poorer outcomes than non-Māori children. The Government continues to provide services to Tamariki Māori and their whānau to address this. *Whānau Ora* aims to ensure that children have what they need to learn and stay healthy. The BPS targets that aim for greater participation in Early Childhood Education and increasing infant immunisation show encouraging results for Māori and Pasifika children in these areas.

An item in the Government's UNCROC Work Programme is to look at what the Government can do to help children and young people have a say on issues that affect them.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***general principles*** in the questionnaire).

What rights and freedoms do children in New Zealand have?

² The UNCROC Monitoring Group is made up of the Office of the Children's Commissioner, the Human Rights Commissioner, UNICEF New Zealand, Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa, Save the Children New Zealand, Every Child Counts and the Child Poverty Action Group. The group monitors and reviews the Government's progress on putting UNCROC into action.

³ A reservation is a statement entered by a State Party when they sign or ratify a treaty which limits or excludes the effect of a particular part of the treaty.

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 affirms civil and political rights for all New Zealanders, including children.

It is important to the Government that we protect the privacy of children and young people and ensure that they can access information on the internet safely. A new Privacy Act and the Harmful Digital Communications Bill will incorporate recent recommendations from the Law Commission to prevent or reduce the harm that cyber bullying can cause.

Keeping children safe from violence is a priority for the Government. This is shown by the Children's Action Plan and the BPS target that aims to reduce assaults on children.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***civil rights and freedoms*** in the questionnaire).

What is the Government doing for families?

The Government offers a range of services to parents and legal guardians who need support to bring up their child. Some services, such as *Well Child/Tamariki Ora*, are for everyone. Other services, such as *Intensive Caseworkers for Teen Parents* are for a small group who face unique challenges.

The Care of Children Act 2004 continues to promote the well-being and best interests of a child when deciding who will look after them. There have also been some recent changes to the Family Court that encourage parents to work out childcare issues outside the Court room and through Family Dispute Resolution.

A review of New Zealand's adoption law is on hold due to other law reform priorities. In the meantime, the Government has done a lot to improve the alternatives to adoption to make sure children have a permanent, safe and loving home while still having a connection with their birth parents. *Home for Life* achieves permanent care for a child in the care of the Government.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***family environment and alternative care*** in the questionnaire).

How does the Government keep children healthy?

Community and primary health services are available for all New Zealand children, and there are special services for children with more complicated needs. The Government is improving immunisation rates and decreasing the incidence of rheumatic fever through its work under BPS target 3. From 1 July 2015, the Government will spend \$90 million over three years to extend the current zero fees for doctors' visits at any time of the day or night, and prescription co-payments, to children aged under 13.

Another priority for the Government is to address suicide amongst young people. The Government is doing this through the *Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Project* for 2012 – 2016 and the *New Zealand Suicide Action Plan 2013- 2016*.

The Government provides financial support to vulnerable children and young people. The Government's approach to child poverty has been to help families and young people to help themselves out of poverty through work and education. However there is always a safety net for those who need it. Budget 2014 provided almost \$500 million in new spending on children and families to support this approach. The Government has also reformed the welfare system and created the Youth Service to help young people build the skills they need to find a job.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***basic health and welfare*** in the questionnaire).

How does the Government help children achieve in education?

The Government has made good progress in early childhood and inclusive education. The participation rate in Early Childhood Education at March 2014 was 95.5 percent (up from 94.7 percent in 2011), with strong growth in Māori and Pasifika numbers. Special education services are provided annually to an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 children as part of ensuring an inclusive learning environment for all children. The *Positive Behaviour for Learning Programme* helps all children achieve by improving the behaviour of disruptive children. The Government continues to fund a range of programmes to encourage children to participate in arts, sport and cultural activities.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***education, leisure and cultural activities*** in the questionnaire).

What is the Government doing for children who need special protection?

Some groups of children and young people are particularly vulnerable and need more protection. The Government's major progress in this area is helping kids who get into trouble with the law. The *Youth Crime Action Plan* aims to increase the options for responding to young people who break the law. *The Turning of the Tide* and aspects of *Policing Excellence* support contact with iwi and Māori groups who live in cities to develop crime prevention action plans that reduce offending, particularly by young people.

The 131,000 children with disabilities in New Zealand can access services for all children. Where they need more support because of their disability, specialist services are available. These include initiatives under the New Zealand Sign Language project, the nation-wide rollout of Wraparound Intensive Individualised Support, and the Autism Spectrum Disorder Work Programme.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***special protection measures*** in the questionnaire).

Ratification of International Human Rights Instruments

New Zealand ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC) on 20 September 2011 and submitted its Initial Report under OPSC on 22 July 2014.

An update on the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict is provided in the Report. New Zealand will consider the implications of signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure as part of its commitment to UNCROC.

(If you would like to comment on the Government's progress in this area, go to the section titled ***ratification of international human rights instruments*** in the questionnaire).