



March 2020
NGO Report

**Close Gaps through
Systemic Change:**

Implement Children's Rights in Canada

Alternative Report for the 5th/6th Review of Canada
Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Canadian Coalition
for the Rights of Children

Coalition canadienne
pour les droits des enfants

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Executive Summary

Canada was a leader and early adopter of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but implementation remains weak in Canada. After the last review in 2012, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) advocated for implementation of recommendations that would be of benefit for Canada. Progress has been made in a few areas. At the same time, however, evidence of serious gaps and systemic failures shows the high costs for children and Canadian society when their rights are not protected.

Canada can no longer legitimately claim that the current systems for protecting the rights of children in Canada are adequate. A second trend is growing awareness that implementing children's rights could make Canada's federalist system of government work better for children, families, and governing bodies. The Convention is an asset for good governance in Canada, not just an obligation or a duty to report to the UN.

This 5th/6th review is an opportunity to make the systemic changes that would be of benefit for children across the country and also fulfill Canada's obligations under the Convention. For this review the CCRC chose to focus on previous recommendations that should be implemented. For each area the full report provides analysis of progress made, the current situation, questions Canada needs to answer, and recommendations for action.

Systems Approach to Implementation: The CCRC continues to advocate for a systems approach to implementation that includes measures from legal reform to public education. A few specific initiatives, the approach reflected in Canada's official report, or relying on one office, such as a provincial children's advocates, are not effective solutions. The recommendations below outline practical steps that combine to support the development of the full potential of every child. Canadian society will also benefit. As stated at the UN General Assembly for Children, a world fit for children is a world fit for all of us.

All Levels of Government: Almost all issues affecting children involve more than one government agency and more than one level of government. Implementing the Convention, which both federal and provincial governments have ratified, could integrate policies that now leave children falling through the cracks between different rules of eligibility and inequitable treatment depending on where they live.

Wide Range of Public Policies: The right to a healthy environment, access to justice, and the right to play are emerging areas in the wide range of policies that impact children's rights. Many areas are addressed through the CCRC [umbrella report](#) and associated in-depth reports by members and allies.

For information on the CCRC: www.rightsofchildren.ca

Summary of Recommendations to Implement Children's Rights in Canada

1. ***Make children's rights part of Canadian law:*** The CCRC recommends that Canada adopt legislation to implement the Convention, with a timetable of ten years to bring existing legislation into compliance. Use Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) of all proposed laws and programs before adoption. Our [full report](#) provides more details and explains why legal measures are essential.
2. ***Take a Systems Approach to Close Gaps and Protect All Children:*** CCRC recommendations for a [systems approach](#) address the following components:
 - a. Data analysis for evidence-based policy and monitoring outcomes
 - b. Senior level coordination at the federal level with input into cabinet decisions
 - c. Senior level intergovernmental body responsible for implementation, informed by a children's commission of all stakeholders, rooted in the Convention
 - d. Independent monitoring at federal and provincial levels
 - e. Child-friendly complaints mechanisms at all levels of government and ratification of Optional Protocol 3 so children can also appeal to UN.
 - f. Budget allocations for children and monitoring for equitable treatment
3. ***Inform Children and Adults about Children's Rights:*** The CCRC recommends that every province in Canada table a plan for teaching children about children's rights, including integration into required curricula before the next review. Government websites can be used for public awareness, reporting progress, and collaborating with civil society organizations. Given the government's position that the current system is adequate and continuing evidence by civil society groups of inequitable access, child-friendly complaint mechanisms are recommended to ensure all children have avenues to be heard and resolve issues relating to their rights. Our [full report](#) goes into further detail.

The CCRC provides specific recommendations on various child rights issues, each stemming from extensively researched studies and reports. As well as the [full report](#), each issue on the following list is linked to a report or fact sheet that provides more detail:

- a. [Best Interests of the Child](#)
- b. [Respect for Views of the Child](#)
- c. [Prevent All Forms of Violence against Children](#), and end [Corporal Punishment](#)
- d. [Child Welfare, Child Labour, and Children in the Criminal Justice System](#)
- e. [Early Childhood Development and Care](#)
- f. [Child Poverty](#) and [Food Security](#)
- g. [Mental Health](#)
- h. [Education Systems and Children's Rights](#)
- i. [Right to Play](#)
- j. [Vulnerable Groups: Indigenous Children, Children with Disabilities, Racial Minorities](#)
- k. [Media and Privacy](#)
- l. [Access to Justice](#)