

Pre-session speech

Thank you, Ms/Mr Chair.

Allow me first to say, that it's an honour to take part of the UPR pre-session of Norway. On behalf of Press - Save the Children Youth Norway, I want to thank the organizers for the opportunity to address the situation on the rights of children in Norway.

Children are an extra vulnerable group with extra rights. Children have their own rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it's important to remember that children are also a part of the Convention on Human Rights. When we discuss human rights topics, it's important to include children's rights as well. Children are also human – so human rights are also children's rights.

Most children in Norway have a good life and only report minor violations of their rights. Despite an overall good situation, there are still some negative trends and developments that are cause for concern. Today I want to highlight two key issues that concerns us the most.

These two issues are: violence against children and discrimination of asylum seeking children.

Violence against children

One in five Norwegian youths say they have experienced physical violence from at least one parent during their childhood. The percentage of children that report severe violence from adults in the family has not decreased the last ten years. The numbers are equal considering serious sexual violations and abuse. The number of children living in Norway is increasing, and consequently, there is an increasing number of children experiencing some kind of violence or abuse. We also consider it a grave concern that vulnerable groups of children are more often subjected to violence and sexual abuse.

Research shows that people with disabilities are exposed to abuse to a larger extent than others, whether the abuse is physical, psychological or emotional. In addition to the increased risk, emergency preparedness for children with disabilities is often lacking or it's weaker when normal. Only 7 of 47 shelters around Norway are universally designed and accessible for children with disabilities. Norway has to ensure that the services of the Children's Houses will be available and accessible to all children regardless of disability. We kindly ask you to consider a recommendation for Norway to protect children from violence and sexual abuse.

Discrimination of asylum seeking children

The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Norway increased in 2015. As a consequence of this, the government has increased the use of temporary residence permits for unaccompanied children between the age of 16 and 18. Many of the children with these permits disappear from asylum centers, and are vulnerable to different types of human trafficking, such as prostitution. In the state report Norway says that the government has routines for when a child goes missing, but these routines are not good enough.

Another issue we want to highlight, is the responsibility for the care of unaccompanied minors. Only the unaccompanied minors under the age of 15 are under the care of the Child Welfare Services in Norway. The children over 15 are in the care of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). The norwegian government has not followed the recommendations from the UN about including all children over the age of 15 in the care of the Child Welfare Services. In the state UPR-report the government addresses this issue, but they omit all the downsides with this arrangement.

First of all, the living condition of refugee children vary depending on where the child lives. In some cases, the food offered at asylum centres is so poor, it has serious health consequences for the children. In some centers where the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has the responsibility of care, the children do not have a single room to spend time alone. In addition, the requirements of staff regarding academic background or experience with caring for children in a vulnerable position is lower in the centers UDI manage than the Child Welfare Services care centers.

The care provision on reception for children over the age of 15 has been documented poorer. 91% of the children under the age of 15 feel safe where they live, but only 50% of the children in the care of UDI feel safe. There are poorer material standards and lower requirements for staffing density. One of the most serious issues is the mental health of children with refugee status. It has been concluded that this group suffer from mental health issues more often than Norwegian children in general.

Asylum seeking children have the same rights as children that are born in Norway, but are not treated the same way. The convention on the rights of the child states that everyone under the age of 18 are children and that all children have the same right to adequate care. All children in Norway, except unaccompanied minors over the age of 15, are under the care of the Child Welfare Services. This is a systematically discrimination of a group of children. All children have the right to not being discriminated, but these children are being discriminated and do not receive proper care. We kindly ask you to consider a recommendation for Norway to ensuring non-discrimination with regards to the care situation of unaccompanied asylum seeking children aged 15 to 18 years.

Thank you!