



**UNCRC@30**

**CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON CHILD RIGHTS IN SRI LANKA 30 YEARS ON**



**Save the Children**



## Executive Summary

Save the Children joined the global action to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 2019. The 30th anniversary (UNCRC@30) provided a strategic opportunity for us to put a spotlight on child rights violations, our proposed solutions, and to call on governments to renew their commitment to fulfil the universal mandate of the UNCRC.

As part of the celebrations, Save the Children in Sri Lanka conducted a series of consultations with children island-wide to gather children's views on children's rights in Sri Lanka. We reached 128 children from 24 districts in the country (all except for the Mannar district) with the support of the Department of Probation and Child Care Services, the District Secretariat in Galle, Vocational Training Center-Rockhill Badulla, Talawakelle Tea Estates PLC and Kelani Valley Plantations PLC.

The consultation process was conducted using a child friendly approach and tools. Each session on a particular cluster was initiated with an interactive introduction session on the definitions, scope and relevant country context. This enabled the children to understand and provide an informed view when answering the questions. The report organises the children's views in line with the UNCRC reporting structure and includes recommendations on how child rights in Sri Lanka can be improved. This initiative was funded by Save the Children's UNCRC@30 Seed Funding.

## Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	4
Objective of the study	4
Study design	4
Sample of the study	5
Findings	
UNCRC Cluster 1: General measures of implementation	7
UNCRC Cluster 2: Definition of the child	12
UNCRC Cluster 3: General principles	13
UNCRC Cluster 4: Civil rights and freedoms	19
UNCRC Cluster 5: Violence against children	21
UNCRC Cluster 6: Family environment and alternative care	24
UNCRC Cluster 7: Basic health and welfare	26
UNCRC Cluster 8: Education, leisure and cultural activities	29
UNCRC Cluster 9: Special protection measures	32
Recommendations	35

## Introduction

“Every generation of children, in fact, offers mankind the possibility of rebuilding his ruin of a world”.

Eglantyne Jebb

Founder, Save the Children

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC/CRC) is the most ratified UN convention in the world. The UNCRC provides a set of international standards on civil, social, political, economic and cultural rights relating to children that imposes an obligation on the states that sign and ratify it.

Children’s Rights first came to light as a Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1923, which was adopted by the League of Nations (LON) as the Declaration of Geneva in 1924. The Declaration of Geneva is a historic document that recognised and affirmed for the first time the existence of rights specific to children and the responsibility of adults towards children. The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention and opened it for signature on 20 November 1989. It came into force on 2 September 1990, following its ratification by the required 20 states, as a promise to every child to protect and fulfil their rights, by adopting an international legal framework. At present, UNCRC is known as the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty in history.

In 2019, we celebrated thirty years since the UNCRC’s adoption. The world celebrated the progress that Child Rights have made for children around the globe, but there is still more to be done.

Sri Lanka signed and ratified the UNCRC in 1991, making a commitment to protect all the rights of all children in Sri Lanka- irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, or ability. Since ratifying the convention, much has been achieved to ensure that children’s rights are respected and protected. The formulation of the children’s charter in 1991, establishment of the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) in 1998 and establishing a separate Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MOWCA) in 2005, increasing the number of government Child Protection Officers and Child Rights Promotional Officers, establishing Child Development Committees, Children’s Councils and Clubs from village to national level have all been progressive steps towards promoting and protecting child rights in the country. Nevertheless, more has to be done to improve the status of children’s rights in the country.

To commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the UNCRC, Save the Children initiated a series of children’s consultations to bring out their voices and to understand the status of Child Rights in Sri Lanka. This report is based on the findings of the voices of 128 children representing 24 districts of the country on how they experienced child rights.

## Methodology

### Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to understand Sri Lankan children's perspectives on the realisation of their rights and to spread awareness among children on the importance of their rights in the year the world celebrates the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

### Study Design

The study is based on qualitative and quasi-quantitative data collected through children's consultations reaching children representing all 24 districts of Sri Lanka. This data was collected through two child friendly self-administered questionnaires, which were available in the local languages, Sinhala and Tamil. The facilitators read all the questions and explained each point to the children to ensure their comprehension of the questions in the questionnaire.

The structure of the questionnaires was based on the UNCRC Clusters.

#### What are UNCRC Clusters

The Committee on the Rights of the Child introduced UNCRC Clusters in its Guidelines for Initial Reports and Periodic Reports as an approach for reporting on Children's rights. According to the Committee, "the provisions of the Convention have been grouped in clusters with a view to assisting States parties in the preparation of their reports. This approach reflects the Convention's holistic perspective of children's rights: that they are indivisible and interrelated, and that equal importance should be attached to each and every right recognized therein".

There are 9 clusters: General measures of implementation; definition of the child; general principles; civil rights and freedoms; violence against children; family environment and alternative care; basic health and welfare; education, leisure and culture; and special protection measures.

## Sample of the study

The sample of this study is purposively selected and comprises 128 children representing 24 districts of the country. The children were reached through four consultations that were conducted during the period of October-December 2019 in four districts: Galle, Badulla, Kurunegla and Nuwara Eliya.

The children consulted were between the ages of 11-18 and composed 73 females and 55 males. Sinhala speaking children accounted for 64% of the total whereas Tamil speaking children accounted for 36%.

Children's consultation	Male	Female	Total
1. National Children's Council Members - held in Kurunegala District	44	24	68
2. Children from Vocational Training Center - Rockhill, Badulla	12	14	26
3. Children's club members from Galle District	10	07	17
4. Children's club members from Estates in Nuwara Eliya	07	10	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>128</b>



Note: The Pie Charts represent the responses received during the first Consultation with the National Children's Council Members representatives of 24 districts (all except for Mannar District).

District representation of the children who participated in the study:

Ampara	2	Monaragala	2
Anuradhapura	4	Mullaitivu	2
Badulla	29	Nuwara Eliya	19
Batticaloa	2	Polonaruwa	2
Colombo	3	Puttalam	3
Galle	19	Ratnapura	3
Gampaha	3	Trincomalee	4
Hambantotoa	3	Vavuniya	2
Jaffna	4		
Kalutara	5		
Kandy	4		
Kegalle	3		
Kilinochchi	1		
Kurunegala	2		
Matale	3		
Matara	4		



## Findings

### UNCRC Cluster I: General measures of implementation

This cluster focuses on what the State is expected to do to implement the UNCRC through law, policy and decisions that affect children:

**Article 4:** States must do all they can to make sure every child can enjoy their rights by creating systems and passing laws that promote and protect children's rights.

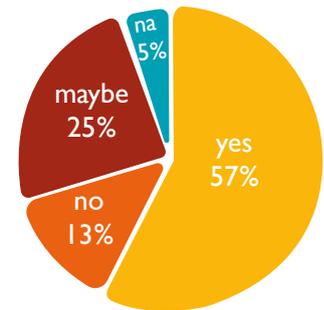
**Article 41:** If a country has laws and standards that go further than the UNCRC, then the country must keep these laws.

**Article 42:** States must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the UNCRC.

#### I. Has Sri Lanka taken sufficient steps to harmonise national laws and policies with the provisions of the UNCRC?

“The government, although has policies, these policies are not implemented in some remote areas”

Children who answered 'yes' indicated that they felt the government had established necessary institutions and policies. Those children who answered 'no/may be' stated that human resources necessary were lacking to ensure these institutions and policies were operationalised in the manner they were intended to. Some said that the policies were not fully functional in rural areas. One issue that was raised was not having a sufficient number of government officers at community level to promote and protect child rights.



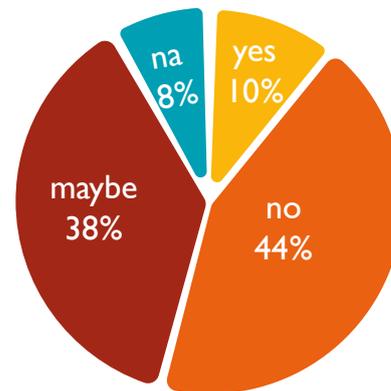
Tamil speaking children noted that there was a shortage of tamil speaking government officers in their areas and that the government should ensure that community level government officers were appointed in accordance with local languages. Children also noted that, even with the government mechanism, there still existed a need to have the support of non-government organisations like Save the Children to support the wellbeing of children.

**Conclusion:** Sri Lanka has progressed in its policies to promote and protect children's rights, but implementation remains an issue especially in the rural areas.



## 2. Has the State made sufficient efforts to make the principles and provisions of the UNCRC widely known by appropriate and active means?

“Although children are educated through various programs, there is not enough knowledge among adults”.



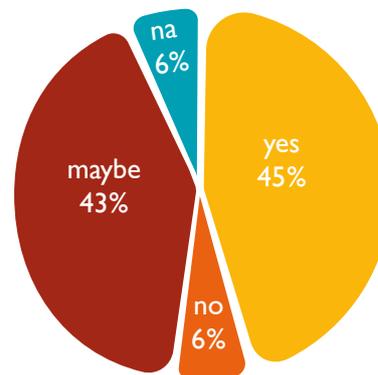
Only 10% of children felt that adults have a good knowledge on child rights. They believe that adults, especially teachers and parents should be made aware of the children's rights so that they are able to understand children's issues and different types of child rights violations they may face, especially in the rural areas. Children also noted that the children's rights should be widely known through all organizations that work at the community level.

They noted that children at present are more aware of their rights mentioned in the UNCRC, mainly through their engagements with the Children's Clubs. Nevertheless, some children said that education on the UNCRC should be incorporated in their school syllabus so that all children would know about their rights.

**Conclusion:** it is evident that there is still significant need to enhance the efforts of government and other stakeholders to increase awareness and education on the rights of children among children and adults, especially parents and teachers.

### 3. Are there adequate allocation of resources for children?

“Resources for urban children do not exist for rural children. Financial and human resource allocations for children should be improved”

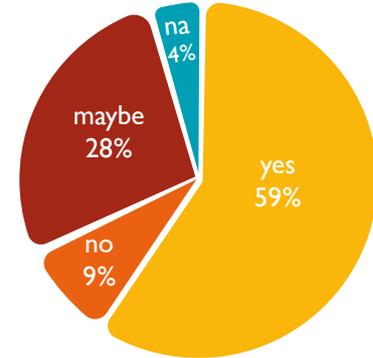


Only 45% of the children consulted said that there was adequate allocation of resources for children in Sri Lanka. A similar proportion of children (43%) said they were unsure if there was adequate allocation of resources for children. Even those children who said there was an adequate allocation of resources highlighted that there was an inequality of distribution of resources to all parts of the country. It was their belief that urban areas benefit from more resources than the rural areas. Children also expressed the view that children with disabilities and children who were orphaned could benefit from increased resource allocation for their education. Another point that was highlighted by the children was that, the government should pay equal importance to allocating human resources and infrastructure for rural and underserved areas.

**Conclusion:** Despite the fact that there is a significant commitment from the government to children’s services such as health and education, there is still significant improvement required in resource allocation for children’s services such as protection and ECCD. Due to the unequal distribution of resources, special attention needs to be given to those who are most marginalised and vulnerable.

#### 4. Are there adequate avenues to complain about child rights violations in Sri Lanka?

“Although 1929 hotline is established, it is not accessible to children who can’t find telephone facilities”



Children collectively, stated that the government had set up systems to receive complaints about child rights violations. The National Child Protection Authorities' 1929 Child helpline was one of them. They said that however, this helpline was only accessible to children who had access to telephone facilities.

According to children consulted, measures of improvement included ensuring fully functional women and children's desks within police stations and appointing Child Rights Promotional Officers at grassroot level.

Conclusion: Children are aware of the 1929 hotline provided by the NCPA. Accessibility to telephone facility remains an issue for children and adults in rural areas to make complaints. There is also a need to ensure that women and children's desks within police stations are functioning and responsive to complaints.

## UNCRC Cluster 2: Definition of the Child

This cluster focuses on the definition of the child and how the State has defined a child in different legal instruments.

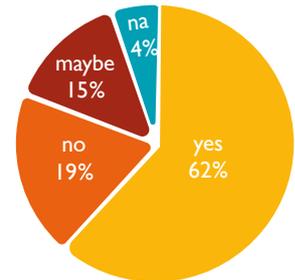
**Article 1:** A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

### Children's Views:

#### 5. Do all laws and regulations in Sri Lanka define children as persons below the age 18?

A majority of the children consulted (62%) agreed that the laws and regulations in Sri Lanka defined children as persons below the age of 18 as per the Article 1 of the UNCRC.

The children consulted expressed that they believed there was a need to change the age of consent from 16 years to 18 years. The children said even though the age of consent was 16, it would still be seen as wrong. The children would not be considered children any more and their rights would not be respected.



“ Children above 16 year who consensually engage in sexual activities will lose their rights as a child in the eyes of the society”

**Conclusion:** Children are in the opinion that the age of consent should be increased from age 16 to 18 years, since even though the law allows consent at 16 years, those who may engage in an consensual sexual activities will lose their rights and respect as a child in the eyes of society and adults.

## UNCRC Cluster 3: General principles

This cluster focuses on the guiding principles of the UNCRC that represent the underlying requirements for any and all rights to be realised:

**Article 2:** State's obligation to respect and ensure the rights set forth in the UNCRC to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind.

**Article 3:** Adherence to the best interests of the child to be the primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

**Article 6:** States must ensure the right to life, survival and development.

**Article 12:** States must respect the views of the child.

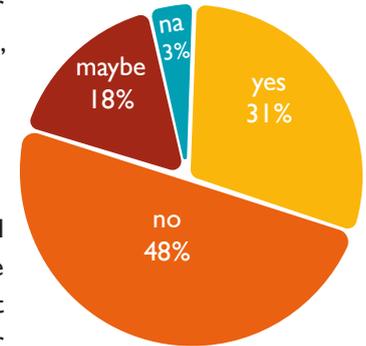
## Children's Views:

### 6. Do all children in Sri Lanka enjoy their rights without discrimination based on socio economic status, disability, ethnicity or religion

31% of the children consulted expressed that children in Sri Lanka were able to enjoy their rights without being discriminated against based on grounds such as socio economic status, disability, ethnicity or religion.

Nevertheless, 48% of the children expressed that discrimination did occur.

They noted that children with disabilities were mostly discriminated against. They expressed that there should be special schools for children with disabilities and that all schools should be accessible and have teachers who knew how to teach children with disabilities. They noted that children with disabilities were also treated unfairly by society, and parents did not allow their children to engage with disabled children. Children stated that people felt overwhelmed when they saw a child with disability and that may prompt them to extend their support.



“Children with disabilities are treated differently in society, and those who do are ignorant”

The children also noted that people discriminated based on religion and ethnicity. Children in the estate sector expressed that they felt they were being discriminated against and marginalised by government officers in their area for being “estate children”.

“This is one of the most pressing issues in society today. Children suffer because of the problems that adults have about race and religion”

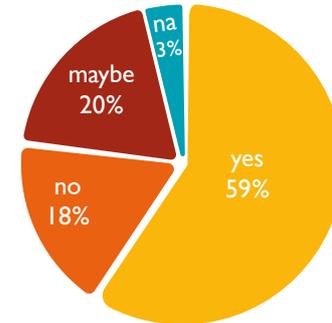
They strongly believed legal action should be taken to prevent racism and that measures should be taken to prevent discrimination against minority children in schools and other institutions.

**Conclusion:** The government needs to better monitor and prevent discriminatory practices against children in schools and communities as well as on social media.



## 7. Do adults think of the best interest of the child when making decisions relating to education, parental support, health and law enforcement?

Most children agreed that adults thought in the best interest of the child when making decisions relating to their education. Some noted that the education curriculum should be less stressful, and at times parents disregarded the mental and physical stress they placed on a child during school which they did to compete with other parents. Children also expressed that they wished that parents would spend more time with their children.



“Although parents look for the best interest of their children in education, they are less interested in the mental and physical aspects of the child”

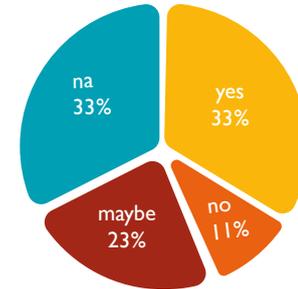
In relation to health sector services, children were satisfied that health sector officials gave due regard to the best interests of the child. They were pleased to mention the separate units for children in hospitals.

A majority of the children felt that their best interest was at the forefront of law enforcement. Nevertheless, they noted that law enforcement professionals did not know enough about child rights.

**Conclusion:** Parents, teachers, health and law enforcement officers need to be educated on how to look into to the best interest of the child when making decisions pertaining to that child. Less linear and more integrated approaches will enable determining and implementing the best interests of children by all stakeholders.

## 8. Has the State ensured, to the maximum extent possible, the survival and development of children in Sri Lanka?

Many children were unaware of how to answer this question. This was evident as 33% of the children left this question unanswered and another 23% answered saying 'maybe'. The 33% of the children who answered 'yes' also said the situation could improve for children in Sri Lanka.



The children who answered 'no' stated that mechanisms to support the emotional health of the children were lacking in Sri Lanka. They said, the competitive education system in the country, starting from the grade 5 scholarships, placed so much stress on children that they sometimes found it difficult to cope. In addition, family issues such as disharmony between parents, physical violence, financial issues at home and alcoholism of the father could contribute to emotional distress for children. Children also noted that only some schools had teachers and qualified counsellors to provide counselling support for children.

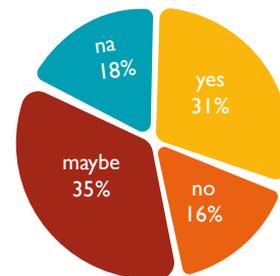
“Parents are always busy with their work. They have very little time to listen to our problems. Children don't have anyone to talk about their problems and get advice from”

**Conclusion:** Mechanisms to support the emotional health of the children should be strengthened in Sri Lanka and parents should be educated on the importance of paying attention to the emotional wellbeing of children.

## 9. Are the views of children are respected and taken into account: In the family, in school, in the decision making process, in service provision, in legal processes ?

31% of the children consulted said that children's views were respected and taken into account within the family, in schools, in decision-making processes, during service provision and in legal processes.

Another 35% of children said that they were not sure whether or not children's views are taken into account, although children's views were solicited and 16% of the children said that their views were not respected or taken into account.



“Teachers only provide opportunities to students to express their opinions only if they agree with the opinions expressed.They don't encourage different opinions”

They specifically noted that children should be encouraged to share their views openly in schools and that teachers needed to listen to their students and make more effort to understand the children.They also stated that the legal processes needed to take the views of the children into account and that was something they saw lacking in this country.

**Conclusion:** Adults need to listen to children and respect their views.Teachers should be made aware of the importance of allowing children to express themselves freely and taking those views expressed by them into account. Sri Lanka has not been able to mainstream child participation at all levels, especially decisions directly impacting their own lives such as judicial, policies and administration.

## UNCRC Cluster 4: Civil rights and freedoms

This cluster focuses on the children's civil rights and freedoms provided in the UNCRC:

**Article 7:** Right to name, nationality and to know and be cared for by parents

**Article 8:** Preservation of child's identity

**Article 13:** Freedom of expression

**Article 14:** Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

**Article 15:** Freedom of association and peaceful assembly

**Article 16:** Protection of privacy

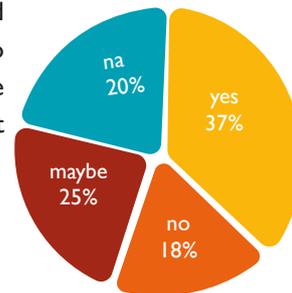
**Article 17:** Child's access to information, and role of mass media

**Article 37(a):** Right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

## Children's Views:

### 10. Do children in Sri Lanka enjoy civil rights and freedoms guaranteed in the UNCRC?

They also noted that some people violated children's privacy on social and in traditional media, especially when they reported on cases of child abuse. They said some people on social media were insensitive, they shared pictures of children who had been subjected to violence or abuse. The traditional media was worse because they published as much detail and description as possible of the child and the incident without considering how it would affect the child involved.



“It is important to protect the rights of children in the media”

The children noted that boy children often enjoyed their rights and freedoms more in society than girls. From a very young age, boys were given more freedom to play and interact with other children. On the contrary, girl children were raised in a very sheltered manner and this caused them to have little understanding about society.

“Girls are not as free as boys. So often girls are trapped in their homes. They have little understanding of society. Every child should be given equal freedom and enjoyment”

**Conclusion:** The government needs to ensure that children's right to privacy is protected by media organisations, especially when reporting on child abuse incidents. Sensitisation programmes should be carried out to challenge social norms that hinder the exercise of rights and freedoms of girl children.

## UNCRC Cluster 5: Violence against children

This cluster focuses on State's responsibility to ensure a family environment to all children and suitable alternative care for those children deprived of a family environment:

**Article 5:** Parental guidance and child's evolving capacities

**Article 18:** Parental responsibilities and State's assistance

**Article 9:** Separation from parents

**Article 10:** Family reunification

**Article 11:** Illicit transfer and non-return

**Article 27(4) :** Recovery of maintenance for the child

**Article 20:** Children deprived of their family environment

**Article 21:** Adoption of children

**Article 25:** Periodic review of placement and treatment

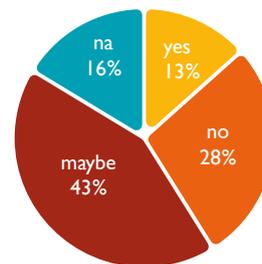
**Article 19:** Protection from all forms of violence

**Article 39:** Rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of violence

## Children's Views:

### 11. Has the state taken sufficient measures to prevent violence against children in Sri Lanka?

Only 13% of the children responded to this question by saying “yes”. Both the groups who said ‘no’ ( 28%) and said ‘may be’ (43%) said they were not satisfied with the measures taken by the government to prevent violence against children in Sri Lanka.



“Children should be educated on how to protect themselves against child abuse and adults should be educated on how to identify signs of child abuse”

Children expressed that they were aware of the high prevalence of child abuse in the country and they believed that was because there was no proper awareness about child abuse risk factors, forms of child abuse and general awareness among children on how to be safe. They noted that, children needed to be educated on child rights and child protection to empower them to protect themselves and their peers from child abuse. Children also held the opinion that parents and adults should be blamed at times for not paying attention to signs of child abuse.

Children stated that children living in poorer communities were more likely to be subjected to child abuse. They mentioned that urban slums were one such place.

“Emotional abuse often takes place in schools among students which causes some children to become depressed and even think of suicide. This is why counselling support should be made available in every school”

Some children noted that violence against children takes place in schools. For instance, children physically assault and emotionally abuse other children. According to the children consulted, bullying often takes place in schools which leads to poor grades and disinterest in attending school, depression and even self-harm/ suicide among victims of bullying. Children consulted also reported that teachers use physical and humiliating punishments to discipline children. According to them, the most common punishments are canning and/ or shaming them in front of the class, both of which cause emotional pain to children.

Some children shared that, children who attended tuition classes have faced various forms of sexual abuse, addiction to drugs and other forms of bad behaviour. Neither the State nor other institutions have taken proper steps to address these issues.

**Conclusion:** Violence against children remains one of the key child rights violations in Sri Lanka. Sexual, physical and emotional abuse and all forms of exploitation still remain high in the country. This takes place both offline and online due to the growth of technology and is often interconnected. The government, parents and care givers, private sector, religious institutions, civil society and society at large therefore need to play their role in preventing and responding to violence against children. This includes educating and empowering children, providing adequate care and protection, understanding children’s needs and potential risks, changing harmful traditional practices such as physical punishment, effective law enforcement, access and outreach services which are critical in addressing the issue.

## UNCRC Cluster 6: Family environment and alternative care

This cluster focuses on State's responsibility to ensure a family environment to all children and suitable alternative care for those children deprived of a family environment:

**Article 5:** Parental guidance and child's evolving capacities

**Article 18:** Parental responsibilities and State's assistance

**Article 9:** Separation from parents

**Article 10:** Family reunification

**Article 11:** Illicit transfer and non-return

**Article 24(4):** Recovery of maintenance for the child

**Article 20:** Children deprived of their family environment

**Article 21:** Adoption of children

**Article 25:** Periodic review of placement and treatment

**Article 19:** Protection from all forms of violence

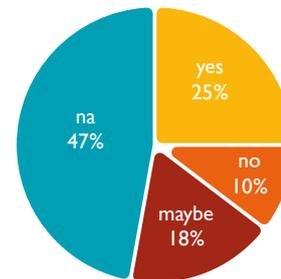
**Article 39:** Rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of violence

## Children's Views:

### I2. Has the State taken action to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families?

Notably, this is a cluster where a majority of children said they were unaware of the status. 47% of all children consulted said that they were unaware of the State measures to prevent unnecessary family separation and whether the state had taken necessary action to ensure the wellbeing of children of migrant parents, implying that this is a topic that needs to be discussed more in detail within children's clubs.

Only 25% of the children consulted said they believed the actions taken by the State were adequate, albeit with certain reservations.



“There is no better place for a child than his or her own home with the love and protection of both parents”

The children who said they were not happy with the measures taken by the State to ensure a family environment for all children, said that the State had not taken necessary action to prevent separation of children from their families. They noted that parents should receive counselling on the matter whenever there was a risk of family separation.

Children noted that more must be done to ensure the wellbeing of children of migrant parents by offering effective counselling services for the parents on the impact of parental migration on children's wellbeing and education. Children expressed that the government should appoint appropriate officials to look into the wellbeing of left behind children.

**Conclusion:** A mechanism should be in place to ensure the wellbeing of the children left behind by migrant parents and there should be adequate measures and systems in place by the government to provide appropriate care and protection for children who are unfortunately separated from their parents as the last resort due to unavoidable circumstances.

## UNCRC Cluster 7: Basic health and welfare

This cluster focuses on State's responsibility to ensure a basic health and welfare for all children within their jurisdiction:

**Article 6:** Right to life, survival and development (see also: III - General principles)

**Article 18(3):** Support for working parents

**Article 23:** Rights of disabled children

**Article 24:** Right to health and health services

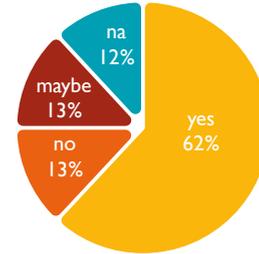
**Article 26:** Right to social security

**Article 27:** Right to adequate standard of living

## Children's Views:

### 13. Are the measures adopted by the State to ensure basic health and welfare of the children is adequate?

During the consultation, 62% of the children noted that they were satisfied with the health care system in Sri Lanka in terms of accessibility and child friendliness, but noted that there were obstacles for children who live in rural settings to access health care services. Children stated that the quality of services could have further improvements with child friendly staff and child friendly processes within the healthcare system.



“Children's units in hospitals should be set up to the proper standards.  
The health status of school children should be checked at least once a month”

Children in the estate sector highlighted that there was a need for better medical services for estate communities. In addition, the children consulted expressed that health services in rural areas were not satisfactory. There were health institutions in rural areas, but there was no maintenance, medicine, or human resources to cater to the needs of children and adults.

When discussing the access of health services for those with disabilities, most children said that, in general, children with disabilities were always disadvantaged. Most of the children were unaware of the assistance the State provides for children with disabilities and what the State has done to make the health services accessible for children with disabilities.

Children also highlighted that there was a need to educate children and their parents on good nutrition practices as most adults and children had compromised meals of nutritional value for convenience foods.

“Many children suffer from health issues as they do not eat breakfast. Good nutrition practices should be introduced to children and their parents”

**Conclusion:** Health facilities in the rural areas and in estates should be improved and the government should ensure that all health service providers provide child friendly services.



## UNCRC Cluster 8: Education, leisure and cultural activities

This cluster focuses on State's responsibility to ensure education, leisure and to engage in cultural activities for all children within their jurisdiction:

**Article 28:** Right to education

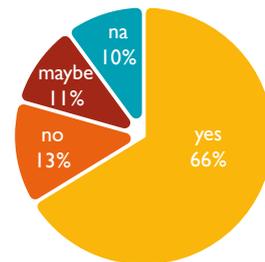
**Article 29:** Aims of education

**Article 31:** Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities

## Children's Views:

### 14. Has the government taken sufficient measures to ensure education, leisure and their engagement of cultural activities?

During the consultations, children noted that they were satisfied with the education system in Sri Lanka, but noted that certain things needed to improve. The education system in Sri Lanka had made children and their parents competitive, as children's performance was measured mainly through grades from examinations. Children suffered because of competitive education. Children also noted that, although parents did it with good intentions for the betterment of their children, parents often overlooked the mental and physical aspects of the child as they tried to bring their children ahead of children of other parents.



“Sri Lanka's education system has become a competitive educational system. The exam system is not for everyone. Often children have to live on exams. Where practical life escapes them”

Some children use their free time for leisure and extra-curricular activities. Children have lost their freedom because of tuition classes. Extra tuition classes are conducted on weekends to make it impossible for children to attend Sunday schools (religious education). If teachers in the school taught the curriculum properly, children would not need to attend tuition classes. The State could set aside special time for children's extra-curricular activities.

Some mentioned that children may be discriminated against because of their skills, and children from rural areas were lacking the same quality education as those located near cities. Children expressed that, in terms of human resources, principals, deputy principals, and teachers were all there in urban schools and surrounding schools, and rural schools had very limited human resources. In terms of financial resources, the State, the old pupils associations and sponsors/ donors provided a large amount of financial resources to the urban schools, but the rural schools did not have such a large amount of financial resources. Buildings, toilets, desks, swimming pools, play grounds, and so on were still good for city schools, but rural schools were basic. Children noted that in some rural schools, there were not enough toilet facilities and this was a big issue mainly for girl children.

In relation to school drop outs, children noted that their classmates who failed O-Levels and A-Levels were not given proper guidance in school, and that they must be given proper follow up after they dropped out. They suggested that there should be a village level mechanism, like a monitoring group, to identify children who dropped out of school, find out why they dropped out and ensure they went back to school.

“The current education system is very competitive and this causes stress among children. This is one reason why children drop out from school”.

Many children praised the government for establishing vocational training institutes for children who dropped out of school. Some recommended upgrading these centers. They also recommended training children who had failed their O-Level examinations.

When posed with their right to leisure, culture and recreational activities, children stated that more could be done to improve this as children were trapped due to the competitiveness of the education process. Parents and teachers should know that for children’s development they needed to engage in cultural activities too.

**Conclusion:** The current education system is very competitive for the children and their parents. Children need specially allocated time for leisure and extracurricular activities without having that time taken up for tuition classes. The distribution of resources including financial, human and infrastructure needs to create equal opportunities for all children, especially those who are underprivileged and marginalized.

## UNCRC Cluster 9: Special protection measures

This cluster focuses on State's responsibility to put in place special protection measures for children

### **A - Children in situations of emergency**

**Article 22:** Protection of refugee children

**Article 38:** Children and armed conflict

**Article 39:** Rehabilitation of child victims

### **B - Children involved with the system of administration of juvenile justice**

**Article 40:** Administration of juvenile justice

**Article 37:** Prohibition of capital punishment and life imprisonment

**Article 39:** Rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims

### **C - Children in situations of exploitation**

**Article 32:** Child labour

**Article 33:** Drug abuse

**Article 34:** Sexual exploitation

**Article 35:** Sale, trafficking and abduction

**Article 36:** Other forms of exploitation

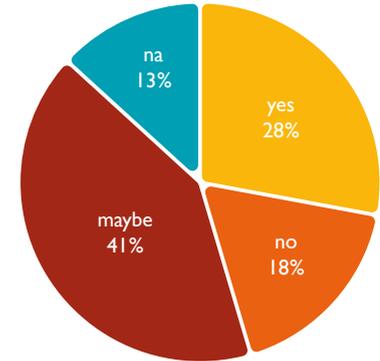
### **D - Children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group**

**Article 30:** Application of the UNCRC to children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group

## Children's Views:

### 15. Has the State established special protection measures to protect children in conflict with the law?

During the children's consultations, children responded saying they were unaware or unsure whether the State had taken adequate measures to protect children in conflict with the law and mentioned that there was room for improvement. This was the reason why 41% of the children had answered "maybe" in the questionnaires. They said that, they had heard that law enforcement usually did not treat children, especially child offenders, in a child friendly manner. Children mentioned that when a child was in the hands of the law, they needed psycho-social support.



“The whole experience of being in conflict with the law must be a gruesome experience for children. They need emotional support”

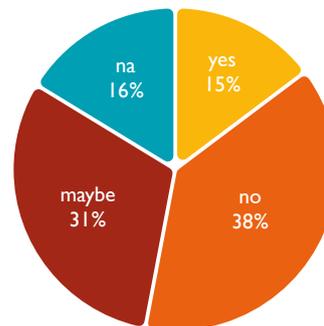
**Conclusion:** Children in conflict with the law should be provided with psycho-social support.

## Children's Views:

16. Has the state taken sufficient measures to prevent children from being subjected to drug abuse?

“In Sri Lanka, drugs have developed into an epidemic. School children are addicted and the laws in place are inadequate”

Both groups of children who answered ‘may be’ and ‘no’ (69%) held the opinion that the State had not done enough to protect them from being subjected to drug abuse. They said many children were addicted to drugs because of ignorance. Children were tempted try drugs and parents were not aware of their children’s activities. Children and parents should therefore be educated on the harmful effects of drug abuse.



Children also said that the government must take steps to stop drug dealers approaching children which often took place near schools and tuition classes. Drug dealers not only got children to use drugs but made children peddle drugs among their peers. There was a need to educate all relevant authorities and the public about drug dealing. They also highlighted that the existing laws relating to drugs and the enforcement of these laws must be strengthened in order to address this issue in Sri Lanka.

**Conclusion:** Children and parents should be educated on the harmful effects of drug abuse. There should also be wider awareness among relevant authorities and the public about how drug dealing takes place.

## Overall recommendations by Save the Children based on children's views:

**Rights education:** Children's rights should be taught to all children as part of the school curriculum. Teachers, parents and all the adults need to first accept that educating children about rights and empowering them to protect themselves from violation of their rights is the best way to protect and promote children's rights as well as give them opportunities to reach their fullest potential as children and as adults in the future.

**Tackle discrimination:** Children should not be treated unfairly based their social status, ethnicity, religion, economic background or any other status'. The government needs to better monitor and prevent discriminatory practices in schools and the community as well as on social media. Children should be educated and informed of their responsibility to respect and protect others rights by refraining from bullying and discrimination of peers.

**Curriculum reform:** The school curriculum and teaching methods should be child centered and enable the holistic development of the child. The mental and physical stress caused to children by the over ambitious curriculum should be addressed. Curricular should enable and equip children to foster life skills, and develop essential skills that foster a love for learning enabling children to discover themselves.

**Testing and assessment:** The education system needs to be less exam oriented with emphasis on holistic child development approaches building a stronger culture of the importance of 'life long learning' among educators.

**Classroom management:** Teachers should listen to children with a view to understand them better. Differing opinions and views as well as questions and challenges should be encouraged in class, to improve children's thinking and analysis. Corporal punishment should be banned in schools and at home.

**Tuition becoming the center of the learning process:** The government should consider measures to reduce, discourage and abolish the culture of tuition that is becoming the center of children’s learning. This leads to serious levels of stress, over burdening and compromises children’s ability to enjoy childhood. It is critical to strengthen a better quality of the teaching – learning environment in schools.

**Access to mental health and psycho-social support:** Understanding teachers and qualified counsellors should be placed in school to support children who are going through emotional difficulties and distress. Teachers and counsellors need to have the right skills to support children who need help. Psycho-social and mental health services are still significantly lacking and these conditions come with a stigma attached. Improvement of services as well as people’s attitudes towards psycho-social and mental health services is a critical way forward.

**Access to quality healthcare:** Sri Lanka has achieved significant progress in providing universal healthcare and maintaining high standards in the region, however healthcare services in rural areas should be improved to the standards available in other parts of the country. The facilities should be complete with the required staff who speak the local languages, and medicines as well as proper maintenance of the buildings.

**Sensitive reporting of violence against children:** Media organisations need to ensure that how they report child abuse does not cause further harm to the child. The government needs to regulate how child abuse is reported and take action against those who cause further harm to the child.

**Tackle drug abuse:** Government should take action to prevent drugs being sold to children within and in the vicinity of schools. Parents, teachers, community leaders, police and other officials should come together to monitor and stop drug dealing with children.

**Efficient reporting line for child abuse:** Government should improve the 1929 NCPA Childline service so that complaints of child abuse are tackled quickly, and children get the help they need before more harm is caused to them.

**Inclusive education for children with disabilities:** There should be schools for children with disabilities. These schools need teachers who really understand how to work with disabilities and special equipment. Teachers need to be capacitated to enable better understanding to support inclusive education.





**Save the Children**

**Save the Children International**

**Address:** 18, Sinsapa Road, Colombo 6. Sri Lanka

**Telephone:** +94 (0) 11 2555 336-8

**Fax:** +94 (0) 11 2555 077

**Website:** <http://srilanka.savethechildren.net>

**Find us on:**   