



The Children and Families Truth Commission

Executive summary

The Children and Families Truth Commission (CFTC) is the first ever parent-led and human rights focused investigation of child protection in the UK. It produced the first surveys of their kind which mapped human rights violations against families in Britain's child protection systems. The findings raised serious concerns about systemic human rights breaches and their impact on the right to family life.

- The child protection system has become draconian and punitive in nature, placing concerning numbers of children in care.
- 83,840 children were in care at the end of March 2023, or one child in every 140.
- [Figures provided by Ofsted](#) say that more than 400,000 children are in the social care system at any one time.

Early intervention reduces costs

The government estimated that the cost of children's social care would be £12.7 billion in 2023 to 2024, £1.2 billion more, or 11% higher than budgeted for in 2022 to 2023. By contrast, research has shown that **early intervention could save the UK economy more than £400 billion over a 20-year period** and improve child and family well-being and life chances.

Policy recommendations

1. Prevention and early support: A legal duty to be placed on local authorities to provide timely and accurate needs-based assessments and support within a human rights framework when families reach out for help.
2. Human rights compliance: The creation of a fully independent review of all current child welfare assessment and intervention models

to evaluate their potential for causing or reducing harm to families.

3. Access to resources: We call on the government to direct funds away from late interventions to services which respond to families' actual needs for example housing, finances and community services.
4. Independent advocacy: Legal representation for families must be independent of the local authority, so that lawyers may only represent either families or local authorities during their careers. Parents should also be given the opportunity to be supported by independent parent advocates. All children should be separately represented by an independent and highly trained lawyer.
5. Case review and reunification: The creation of an authentically independent body to review children's care plans, contact plans and reunification plans. Reunification programs should be prioritised in child welfare practice.
6. Open and voluntary adoptions: The government should abolish non-consensual (forced) and closed adoptions and replace these with policies promoting open and voluntary adoptions.

Required changes to legislation

7. Prohibiting dishonest evidence: Legislation should be amended to include robust penalties for dishonesty or inaccurate evidence produced by professionals.
8. Avoiding misrepresentation: Legislation must take into account provision for children's wishes and feelings to be audio recorded and submitted as evidence to the court.
9. Protecting families' rights: Legislation must be passed that requires child welfare professionals and police to [inform families of](#)

[their rights](#) at every stage of a child's journey through the system.

About the research

Two surveys were produced which gathered the views and experiences of parents and children, of children's social care and child protection in England and Wales. They explored these experiences through a human rights lens, identifying where there have been human rights violations.

The surveys gathered over 600 responses from across all regions in England and Wales.

It is evident that children from families living in poverty are being disproportionately affected by state intervention. Those living in the most deprived areas in England are 13 times more likely to be placed on a child protection plan and 11 times more likely to be placed in care than those living in the least deprived areas.

Key findings

- **93%** of respondent families said that they did not receive the support they asked for, either by their local authority or other services.
- **90%** of respondents said they were not offered support by their local authority for the issue that led to their child being removed.
- **94%** said that child welfare assessments were not accurate or based on true information.
- **69%** percent of respondents said their legal representation was not fair, supportive or independent.
- **67%** of respondent families said that their mental health was used as evidence to say they were unable to care for their child.
- **94%** of respondents said their contact was unjustly denied or restricted 86% of respondents said that they were not told they could apply for post- adoption contact.
- **76%** of respondents said they were not given information about parental responsibility during the life of their family's case.

The Commission's findings demonstrate that the children's social care system is profoundly

harmful and unsupportive for families and children, and is clearly incompatible with human rights legislation in the UK.

The findings are part of a bigger picture already established in research and case law which show that these human rights violations have become a daily feature of the system.

Conclusion

Far from being supportive and problem-solving, the Commission's findings show that children's social care is experienced as deeply harmful, punishment-focused and unsupportive for families and children. This style of practice is incompatible with human rights laws in the UK.

There is a need to bring social work back to Frederic Seebom's vision of a preventative and community-focused service, where families and individuals are empowered to live and thrive, and social work plays an active role in tackling disadvantage and inequality.

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