

## Statement - Warda Abdalla for Sweden

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### INTRO

**Excellencies, distinguished members of the UPR Working Group, fellow speakers, good afternoon.**

My name is Warda Abdalla and I represent Save the Children Youth Sweden. It is an honor to speak before you today. As has been mentioned, the government held one meeting for civil society organizations back in October, but we were unable to attend. As a membership movement of people under the age of 25, we organise spaces for children and young people to express their concerns and take action to ensure their rights. We see an erosion of children's rights and will hereby present our perspectives and recommendations. Now more than ever, an urgent action is needed on the issues of **migration, discrimination, meaningful participation** and **climate change**.

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### ISSUES

#### 1) **Discrimination: Migration and racism**

The first issue is Migration and Racism. The government, together with the extremist party Sweden Democrats, have decided to diminish this right to asylum under the so-called Tidö agreement.<sup>1</sup> We see a concerning lack of protections for children's rights and perspectives of children represented in migration policies. We see a worrying trend where children are often mentioned as "young adults", and proposals where children in practice would be seen as adults, often in the name of migration or anti-crime policies.

The restricted access to permanent residency and stricter policies regarding family reunification<sup>2</sup> are a risk factor for children and young people today. A welfare system that once ensured the rights of all children, now proposes families should qualify to benefit. We look at this with worry as children will fall victim for the actions of their parents.

In an attempt to eradicate street violence, the government has also introduced so-called "visitation zones".<sup>3</sup> This concerns us due to the high risk for racial profiling, particularly amongst young people.

We would like to remind the government that children's rights apply to ALL children in Sweden, regardless of their judicial status.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://tido-avtalet.se/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://asylrattscentrum.se/tidoavtalet/skarpta-villkor-for-anhoriginvandring/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/lagratsremiss/2024/02/sakerhetszoner/>

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We therefore urge the Swedish government to:

- Ensure the protection of children fleeing conflict zones by guaranteeing permanent residency and ensuring medical evacuation from war zones
- Ensure that there is a child rights perspective to all proposed migration policies
- Ensure equal access to rights for children in disadvantaged groups, including asylum-seeking-, refugee- and migrant children

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#### **2) Discrimination of queer children**

The second recommendation is about discrimination of queer children. We see that LGBTQI-children often are discriminated against in regards to health, including both physical, psychological and sexual health.<sup>4</sup> Lgbt-children run a greater risk of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. It is common for intersex-children to have their right to health violated at an early age. Non-necessary surgeries are often conducted without consent which has shown to lead to both mental and physical negative consequences.<sup>5</sup> In addition to this, many lgbt-children choose not to seek medical care due to a fear of discrimination.

It is common for LGBTQI-children to fall victim to harassment and harm, in schools, online and in person.

Children seeking refuge in Sweden risk not having their sexual identity part of their asylum claims due to the shadow of their parents. Further, we see children in a migratory context have their claims questioned by Swedish authorities.

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We urge the Swedish government to:

- Ensure access to healthcare for all LGBTQI-children
- Take all possible measures to protect LGBTQI-children from all forms of violence such as banning conversion therapy and ensure accessible support services for affected children
- Ensure all LGBTQI-children seeking refuge have access to asylum in Sweden

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<sup>4</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment nr 15, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, 2017; FRA, 2015; OHCHR, undated; Sandberg, 2015; OASH, 2025.

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**3) Participation and the right to be heard**

Thirdly, every child has the right to meaningful participation in all issues that concern them, in line with article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We believe that the rights of children are meaningless if the owner of the right does not have the ability to claim responsibility from the violating party and receive reparations. To this day, Sweden has yet to ratify the Third Optional Protocol of the Convention which is instrumental in ensuring that every child has their rights fully attained. Children are experts on their own situations and should be treated as such.

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We would therefore like to urge the Swedish government to:

- Take the necessary steps to ratify the third optional protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
  
- Include children in all legislative processes, by ensuring meaningful participation
  
- Ensure that professionals are trained in how to engage with children and young people
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**4) Climate change**

Last but not least is the issue of Climate Change. We look at the budget reductions in regards to climate policy to be harmful. The government was recently reported to the EU Commission for not meeting climate targets.<sup>6</sup> This affects children and young people - not only in the future but also in their current lives. We see how children are affected negatively, and how they are concerned about the future of the environment.

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We therefore urge the Swedish government to:

- Ensure the necessary funding to adequately address climate change in order to ensure every child's right to a safe and healthy environment, both today and in the future

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.eceee.org/all-news/news/news-2024/sweden-not-on-track-to-meet-climate-targets-warns-expert-agency/>

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**CLOSING REMARKS**

That concludes our recommendations on the issues of migration, discrimination, meaningful participation and climate change. We are hopeful in this process, going forward, and we thank you for your time.