
Joint Statement on Children and Emergency Preparedness

by the Nordic Ombudspersons for Children

The Nordic Ombudspersons for Children in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Greenland and Åland issue this joint statement to national authorities and governing bodies of the autonomous regions in our respective countries.

Children are rights-holders, and emergency preparedness and crisis management must be firmly grounded in children's rights, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Experiences from recent crises, including pandemics and other large-scale emergencies, have demonstrated that children are often disproportionately affected by preparedness measures and crisis responses that are not sufficiently adapted to their needs, rights and lived realities. Experience shows that children are often excluded from decision-making processes or involved too late to influence decisions. This highlights the need for more systematic approaches to ensuring children's participation in times of crisis.

This joint statement reflects the shared position of the Nordic Ombudspersons for Children on key priorities that must be safeguarded in preparedness planning, crisis response and recovery. The points below are inspired by the overarching principles developed for children and crisis situations through the assignment given by the Nordic Council to the Nordic Welfare Centre on children, pandemics and participation.

We call on authorities at all levels to ensure that the following principles are systematically integrated into emergency preparedness frameworks, legislation, policies and practice:

1

Protect the Ombudsperson's mandate and ensure inclusion in all matters affecting children

The independence and mandate of the Ombudspersons for Children must be protected at all times, including during emergencies and crises. Authorities must ensure that Ombudspersons are meaningfully included in preparedness planning, decision-making and evaluation processes in all matters that affect children.

2

Protect the normality of children's lives as far as possible

In emergency situations, measures should be designed and implemented in ways that preserve children's everyday lives, routines and social relationships to the greatest

extent possible. Maintaining access to education, play, leisure activities and social interaction is essential for children's well-being, development and resilience.

3 Ensure the protection, provision and participation of children's rights

Emergency preparedness and response must uphold the full spectrum of children's rights:

- **Protection:** Safeguard children from all forms of harm, violence including sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect and rights violations, as well as heightened risks that may arise during crises and emergencies.
- **Provision:** Ensure children's access to essential services, including education, health care, psychosocial support and information that is age-appropriate, accessible and tailored to the needs and circumstances of different groups of children.
- **Participation:** Guarantee children's right to be heard and taken seriously in decisions that affect them, both individually and collectively, including in emergency planning and crisis management. Participation must be safe, inclusive and adapted to the age and situation of different groups of children.

4 Undertake systematic Child Rights Impact Assessments

Systematic Child Rights Impact Assessments must be carried out before emergency measures are adopted and implemented and revisited throughout the duration of a crisis. Such assessments are essential to identify potential negative impacts on children, in particular children in vulnerable situations, prevent rights violations and ensure that decisions are proportionate, necessary and in line with children's best interests.

The Nordic Ombudspersons for Children urge authorities to take into account these principles, not as optional considerations, but as fundamental requirements for rights-based, effective and sustainable emergency preparedness. Children's rights, perspectives and needs must be central—before, during and after crises.

The Nordic Ombudspersons for Children also emphasize the importance of continued cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experiences between the Nordic countries in strengthening children's rights in times of crisis.


Norway Sweden Denmark Finland

Iceland Greenland Åland