

ENOC 26th Annual Conference

# SHAPING THE FUTURE: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN A CLIMATE CRISIS



19 – 20 September 2022

HARPA Conference & Concert Hall, Reykjavík

Hosted by the Ombudsman for Children, Iceland

# Conference Summary

The ENOC 26th Annual Conference took place in Reykjavik, Iceland on 19 - 20 September 2022. The 26th ENOC General Assembly with the election of the new ENOC Bureau took place directly after the Conference on 21 September 2022. The event brought together 95 participants, thus including 53 participants from ENOC member institutions, 30 young people and their coordinators involved in the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) project, observer Ombudspersons for children from Europe, non-governmental organisations operating in the children's rights field, governmental authorities from Iceland, representatives of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, European Parliament, Council of Europe, but also local and international child rights experts and climate activists. Prof. Laura Lundy introduced the main findings of the ENOC's Synthesis Report on Children's Rights and Climate Justice at the Annual Conference.

In 2022, young people from 17 countries (Albania, Andalusia/Spain, Basque country/Spain, Belgium Flanders, Catalonia/Spain, Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Jersey, Malta, Northern Ireland/UK, Poland, Scotland/UK, Slovakia, and Wales/UK) took part in the ENYA project "Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk about Climate Justice." The aim of the ENYA project is to provide a forum for the participation of young people, thus giving them a voice, in 2022, on the issue of Climate Justice and Children's Rights. After learning and working on the topic of Climate Justice at the national level, young people met at the annual ENYA Forum, which took place in Bilbao, Basque country on 28-30 June 2022. At the Forum, the Young Advisors shared their country recommendations and worked together to elaborate common recommendations on the issue of Climate Justice. The ENYA policy recommendations are reflected in ENOC's 2022 Policy Statement on Climate Justice and Children's Rights. A full report of the ENYA Forum is available [here](#).

**"It's no longer a future problem but a present catastrophe"**


# DAY 1: 19 September 2022

## Conference Opening



## Opening Session

**Theoni Koufonikolakou**, ENOC Chairperson, and Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights, Greece, opened the conference by expressing her delight with being able to meet in Iceland for the 26th ENOC conference, to share thoughts, listen carefully to the Young Advisors and to draw conclusions that will help ENOC Members take a step forward in the protection and promotion of children's rights collectively at a national and a European level. Ms. Koufonikolakou emphasised the mission of ENOC to uphold all children's rights. She noted that the last three years have been filled with challenges, including fighting the familiar systemic defiance and stereotypes and shortcomings of the educational system, as well as dealing with a constant state of crisis with the pandemic and then the war in Ukraine.




Ms. Koufonikolakou further stressed the importance of ENOC's statements regarding children's rights in relation to the war in Ukraine. The effects of rising energy prices on the cost of living in Europe have dramatic consequences on children's rights, leading children, especially the most vulnerable, to poverty and social exclusion, and youth already living in poverty, to destitution. Poverty is the most significant violation of human rights still affecting children in all ENOC countries. Ms. Koufonikolakou stressed that ENOC should develop a statement emphasising the importance of a rights-based approach to address the impact of high energy prices on children and families.

The climate crisis has immense effects on both the everyday lives and the future of children. It is also the source of multiple rights violations. Global warming, the destruction of ecosystems and the natural environment, the impact of pollution on air and water, and unsustainable methods of production undermine children's rights to physical health and holistic development and create a new form of anxiety for children, eco-anxiety.

**Salvör Nordal**, ENOC Chairperson-elect, the Ombudsman for Children in Iceland started by welcoming everyone to the 26th ENOC conference and expressed her excitement for having the opportunity to host the conference for the first time in Iceland. Ms. Nordal emphasized the importance of the ENOC network for it provides the opportunity to discuss important issues, share experiences, learn from and support each other; all of this being crucial to improving ENOC's work. Indeed, listening and consulting with children deepens ENOC's understanding and boosts its action. Children bring new aspects to various topics and solutions that are often overlooked. By inviting children to join the conversation, listening to them, and taking note of their opinions, the institutions' work and decision-making can improve.

Ms. Nordal specified that for decades scientists have been warning about climate change and the threat it poses to the environment, and as ***we have not been listening carefully, we have been slow to react, and have not taken the issue seriously enough***. The message of a climate crisis has reached children and young people far better than those who are older and are in power.






Children have been fighting for the environment, and they understand the urgency of the matter. It is extraordinary to witness how children and young people have been able to voice their concerns and see the impact they have on public debate on the matter. *Children want straight answers, they are impatient, and rightly so.*

Ms. Nordal stressed that it is ENOC's role to support them and make sure that their views are heard and that they can have an impact. Ms. Nordal reported that since consulting with children is one of the main goals of the Ombudsman of Children in Iceland, there are many ways in which this is ensured, including through the Advisory Group for Children (consisting of 12–18-year-olds), the Youth Council for the SDGs (13–18-year-olds), appointed by the Prime Minister. The Ombudsman of Children in Iceland consults with these groups regularly. Moreover, the Children's Forum takes place every other year, and climate change was chosen as a discussion point since the Forum's first edition in 2019. Ms. Nordal concluded that the topic of focus of the 26th Conference is crucial and that ENOC must continue to empower children and involve them in every aspect of its work and activities, decision-making included.

**Zuria Arzua Cebolla**, ENYA 2022 General Coordinator and ENYA Coordinator at the Ombudsman's Office of Basque country, Spain, spoke about ENYA 2022 activities at the Opening Session.

*The topic of climate justice was particularly engaging for the young people and a challenge for most of our offices, who were not very experienced in it from the perspective of child rights and their access to justice.*

The ENYA group was very interested in the urgent topic of climate justice as it impacts children and all of humanity. Ms. Arzua introduced the main goals of the ENYA 2022, which were to exercise the right to participate and be heard in environmental policies, to ensure the right to a decent life for all children and young persons, while facilitating collective reflection from different approaches.




In 2022, 17 groups from 17 regions and countries across Europe took part in the ENYA project, with a total of 296 young people aged 13-17 as participants. They worked on **climate action as a main subject** and then four other subtopics:

- climate change exacerbating North-South global inequalities;
- consumption and the growth paradigm;
- mobility and management of the territory;
- energy sources.

Each group worked on the main subject of climate action and chose at least one of the other subtopics. Between February and June 2022, the Young Advisors took part in several activities with experts and coordinators in their home countries. The activities revolved around various sub-topics related to climate justice and culminated with the young people drafting recommendations on the main area. After learning and working on climate justice at the national level, they all met at an annual youth meeting - the ENYA Forum - held in Bilbao, Basque country, between 28-30 June 2022.

**“It was great to meet other young people. I liked that we sat in a circle with coordinators on the outside. I like how we made lots of decisions with limited adult input.”**


**“This experience is the best I’ve ever made. Cooperating for a common goal so significant helped me to understand the power of a group.”**



**Philip Jaffé**, a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and **Jonas Schubert**, an expert, at Terre des Hommes, described the preparation process of General Comment No. 26 that is forthcoming. The Committee made the decision, in June 2021, to draft a general comment on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change. In his speech, Mr. Jaffé emphasised the importance that the general comment will have, staying relevant long after adoption. He explained that General Comment No. 26 will be constructed differently than previous ones, which were designed around the general principles of the CRC. Instead, the rights most urgently affected by the climate crisis will be drawn out: beginning with the right to life, survival, and development, then going on to the right to health, right to education, right to an adequate standard of living, and so on.

Mr. Jaffé spoke about the decision of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on *Sacchi et al. v. Argentina et al.*, adopted by the Committee under the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The communication was submitted by 16 children from 12 countries on 23 September 2019, the day of the UN Climate Action Summit. The petitioners alleged that the acts and omissions of the five respondent states regarding climate change caused them harm and ongoing violations of their rights enshrined in the Convention. The Committee found that states have extraterritorial jurisdiction over harms caused by carbon emissions, but ultimately found the petitioners' communication inadmissible, due to their failure to exhaust domestic remedies.

The Committee recognises the importance of working with children on matters of relevance to their lives. General Comment No. 26 is therefore being shaped and drafted with the participation of children and young people. **Jonas Schubert** spoke about the process of involving children. He introduced the work of the first global Children's Advisory Team. The team consists of 13 child experts, between 10 and 17 years of age, from different regions, backgrounds, and with diverse experiences.



The work of the Children's Advisory Team is central to ensuring children have meaningful opportunities to contribute with their views, experiences, and ideas to the development of General Comment No. 26. Consultation will be conducted online firstly to seek answers on children's rights and the environment to help in the draft of the General Comment. Secondly, consultations will seek feedback on such draft. Both consultations will have child and youth versions to collect their perspectives. Thematic workshops will be conducted where experts, young and old, will come together to discuss the topic of children's rights and the environment. Further, regional, and local workshops will be held to make sure regional priorities are considered in the final version of the General Comment and that children from marginalised backgrounds are supported in participating.

**Children have emphasized that there is no need for new declarations. Children want decision-makers to take action and implement the environmental treaties that are already in place.**



## Iceland's strategy on Climate Change

**Svandís Svavarsdóttir**, Minister of Food, Fisheries and Agriculture of Iceland, spoke about the fundamental and detrimental effects that climate change will have on children and their rights in the future. She emphasised the importance of acting without delay and the value of taking into account the views of children and making sure that their voices are heard at the highest level of decision-making. She further introduced Iceland's strategy to achieve carbon neutrality before 2040 and to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 under the Paris Agreement. Iceland has adopted a Climate Action Plan, that contains 48 actions and is Iceland's main policy instrument in reaching its goals of cutting emissions and achieving carbon neutrality.

According to the Icelandic Act on the Children's Ombudsman, the Ombudsman must actively consult with children. This includes having a group of children to advice on various issues that concern children in Icelandic society. The Young Advisory Group consists of children between the age of 12 and 17 from diverse background, that work with the Ombudsman on all matters concerning children's rights. The Ombudsman for Children in Iceland continuously works to strengthen the involvement of the group and to ensure that the young advisors have different experiences to draw from.

Four representatives from the Ombudsman's Young Advisory Group and one from the Youth Council for the UN Sustainable Development Goals joined the Minister on stage. Mrs. Svavarsdóttir asked the Young Advisors their opinion on what they consider to be the most important current issues regarding the environment. The children stressed the importance of efficient recycling systems, sustainable use of energy, and education of both children and adults on climate issues. The Young Advisors posed questions to the Minister, including on how children's participation in decision-making is ensured, on the ways to reduce pollution in the sea, on the possibility to grow more in Iceland and import less, and on how education about the climate crisis can be improved.

**Dr. Laura Lundy**, Professor at Queen's University, Belfast and University College Cork introduced ENOC's [Synthesis Report](#) on Climate Justice. The report was authored by **Dr. Aoife Daly** and Prof. Laura Lundy, with the assistance of **Lotte Konig**. Prof. Lundy presented the key findings of the report. Data was collected from the ENOC member states via a scoping survey. The survey aimed to provide an overview of what is happening concerning children's rights and climate justice across the ENOC member states and where there is a need for improvement. The questions were devised to capture the current state of affairs regarding children's human rights and their opportunities for complaint and redress for breaches of human rights and climate injustice. Responses were received from 29 of the ENOC Members. The findings of the scoping survey are presented in the report under ten core themes. The section starts with a short analysis of relevant international human rights law, followed by a summary of the reported state of implementation across the membership and examples of good practice.

## ENOC SYNTHESIS REPORT

# Children's Rights & Climate Justice

September 2022





**ENYA delegates** presented their main findings on what rights are at stake from the perspective of children. Among the rights that the children found to be at stake was the right to play (Article 31 CRC) which extreme weather conditions, floods, and fires, will make it harder for many children to enjoy. ENYA delegates informed that the right to the highest attainable standard of health is also at risk because of the both direct and indirect detrimental impact that changing climate has on children's health. Further emphasis was placed on the importance of Article 12 of the CRC and the need to listen to the views of children on climate change and promote children's participation. They further pointed out that every child has the right to receive information about the state of the environment per Articles 17 and 28 of the CRC.

**Workshops** were conducted on human rights education, the right to seek, receive and impart information, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the right of children to access justice mechanisms and Ombudspersons upholding children's rights during climate crisis. Representatives from each workshop then introduced the conclusions from the discussions held separately.



## DAY 2: 20 September 2022

Day two of the 26th ENOC conference started with a session on Children's rights from the perspectives of European organisations. Bruce Adamson, former ENOC Chair, and Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, acted as moderator for the session. The first speaker, **Regína Jensdóttir**, Head of the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division, gave a thorough overview of the Council of Europe's Strategy regarding children's rights in crisis and emergency situations. The second speaker to address children's rights from the lenses of European organisations was **Charlotte Altenhöner-Dion**, Advisor on Children's Rights to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

**ENYA Young Advisors** took part in a panel session on Children as Human Rights Defenders with the participation of Prof. Laura Lundy and Bruce Adamson.

**Sævar Helgi Bragason**, science educator, and **Sigurlaug Arnardóttir** from Landvernd, the Iceland Environment Association, presented a session on empowering children through education. Former participants of the Young Reporters for the Environment spoke about their experiences of participating in a competition providing children and young people aged 11-25 the opportunity to research environmental issues and promote solutions through investigative reporting, photography, and video journalism.

**Jökull Jónsson**, a 16-year-old musician and climate justice activist, performed a few songs he has composed on the state of the environment. Below are some lyrics translated into English:

## Pollution

Even though our children face pollution  
Industrial plants are burning the plants  
The little rose smells of toxic gas  
I do not care at all


The oceans are being polluted  
Factories are pumping poison into every bay  
Fluoride and diatomaceous  
Will surely bring us more fortune and happiness  
If there is money to be made  
To you Mammon we pledge,  
The birds and the fish in the ocean  
And the green valleys as well

Let's sell the waterfalls and the mountains  
Nature is all for sale  
And the trolls will take my country

Poisonous gas, phosphorous and faded grass  
The future dreamland  
Of a little nation  
A lot of dirt  
But even more money  
Millionaires are constantly getting richer  
The birds have flown away  
There is not a bone to be had from the sea  
The life of plenty is sweet  
And is available to everyone

Let's sell the waterfalls and the mountains  
Nature is all for sale  
And the trolls will take my country





**Caroline Vrijens**, Children's Rights Commissioner in Belgium, Flanders, acted as Moderator for the session where the ENYA group presented their Recommendations on Climate Justice.

### **ENYA 2022 Recommendations on Climate Justice:**

1. Recommendation: **Environmental and climate knowledge** should be part of formal school education. It should start in early childhood, and it should include children's rights and how they are affected by climate change. Environmental and climate education should take a practical approach: it should be empowering for children and provide tools to know how to tackle climate change in everyday life. It should not be limited to lessons but should include active learning methods such as excursions, workshops, debates, and peer education.
2. Recommendation: **The views of children on climate change** ought to be listened to and their participation promoted. To this effect, we recommend adequate spaces to share ideas, dedicated channels to introduce suggestions (e.g., suggestion boxes), and to speak directly to policymakers as well as a more accessible attitude on the politicians' side.
3. Recommendation: **Encourage local eco-activism** with events, campaigns, action days, and networking possibilities that allow for an exchange of ideas: "Eurovision" of climate actions. These campaigns must include the experience of young people who have suffered the detrimental effects of climate change.

4. Recommendation: **Facilitate access to reliable information on climate change** by providing information and training on media literacy and critical thinking, and fighting fake news with truthful information. Governments should provide reliable and accessible information on their policies, decision-making processes, and on relevant environmental statistics. Governmental information should help children identify breaches of their rights and redress mechanisms. Truthful information should not be provided only on online channels, but also in analogic formats in mailboxes.

5. Recommendation: Companies and businesses with good environmental and climate policies should be rewarded with **reputation campaigns** and seals. In contrast, information should be provided on companies that greenwash as well as on alternatives to them. Financial penalties should be imposed on companies that damage the climate in proportion to their profit. The money should be used to promote eco-responsible operations within or in other companies.



**Claudia Kittel**, Head of the CRC Monitoring Mechanism at the German Institute for Human Rights, and **Leo Ratledge**, Co-Director at the Child Rights International Network spoke about cooperation with other NHRIs/ICRIs or Networks.

The conference concluded with all the ENOC members giving updates from their countries on the state of children's rights and the implementation of the CRC.

**Salvör Nordal** thanked everyone for their attendance and participation at the 26th ENOC Annual Conference in Reykjavík. She gave special thanks to the ENYA Young Advisors and everyone that had been involved in organizing the event.



# ENOC 26th General Assembly

## [ENOC Members Only]

The ENOC General Assembly meeting consisted of an opening from the ENOC Chair, Theoni Koufonikolakou, the passing of the ENOC Chair to Salvör Nordal, and the election of the new ENOC Bureau.

The statement on Children's Rights and Climate Justice was reconfirmed to be endorsed by the members. Additionally, the ENOC 2021 Accounts and Provisional Budget for 2022 were reviewed and approved.

### The new Bureau:

- **The current Chairperson:** Salvör Nordal, Ombudsman for Children, Iceland.
- **The past Chairperson:** Theoni Koufonikolakou, Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights, Greece.
- **The Chairperson-elect:** Caroline Vrijens, Children's Rights Commissioner, Belgium Flanders.
- **The Secretary:** Andres Aru, Head of Children and Youth's Rights Department, Chancellor of Justice, Estonia.
- **The Treasurer:** Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, Ireland.
- **Ordinary Member:** Ketevan Sokhadze, Head of the Children's Rights Unit, Office of the Public Defender of Georgia.
- **Ordinary Member:** Helenca Pirnat Dragicevic, Ombudsman for Children, Croatia.



**Government of Iceland**

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