



UK Mission to the
United Nations
in Geneva

UK Mission Geneva

Avenue de la paix 5-7
1202 Genève
Switzerland

+41 79 865 57 68

Note Verbale No.

Geneva, 8 May 2025

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland presents its compliments to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to submit its response to communication UA GBR 23/2025 further to the letter dated 2 December 2025 from the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; the Special Rapporteur on the right to education; and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences.

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



Special Procedures Branch
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights



UK Mission to the
United Nations
in Geneva

UK Government Response to the letter from the Working Group on People of African Descent, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls

Thank you for your letter of 2 December 2025.

The UK Government does not comment on or intervene in individual cases of child protection and care proceedings. In the UK, local authorities have statutory duties to safeguard children, including bringing them into care where it deems it in the child's best interests. This response therefore seeks to set out the UK Government's legislative and policy position in relation to the issues set out in the letter and does not provide commentary or observation on the individual case around which these questions are posed.

The UK Government has contacted Southwark Council to make them aware of your correspondence. The Council stated they have followed the statutory child protection procedures put in place by the UK Parliament. If the family has already exhausted Southwark Council's formal complaints' procedure, they may wish to refer their complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The LGSCO looks at complaints about councils and other authorities and organisations. It is a free service. Their job is to investigate complaints in a fair and independent way. More information on making a referral to the LGSCO is available at www.lgo.org.uk or by calling their advice line on 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983.

The UK Government has provided an overview of the wider policy issues raised in the correspondence that do not pertain to the details of the specific case:

An overview of children's rights

The UK Government is committed to safeguarding and advancing children's rights. It firmly upholds the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which the UK ratified in 1991. It is important for all children – regardless of race, religion or abilities – to have equal civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The UK Government is dedicated to providing the best possible opportunities for all children and has a wealth of existing domestic legislation which gives effect to the UNCRC and safeguards the rights of children. This includes the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 and supporting statutory guidance.

The statutory framework relating to child protection

The principle primary legislation for children's social care and child protection in England is the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. This legislation makes it clear that the welfare of children is paramount and that they are best looked after within their families where it is safe and in their best interest. The Children Act 1989 sets out specific duties for local authorities to provide services to children in their area if they are in need and to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.



UK Mission to the
United Nations
in Geneva

In deciding whether to make a care or supervision order, the courts must be satisfied that the threshold for significant harm has been met and that making an order is necessary to ensure the child's best interests are met. The court will consider the care plan submitted by the local authority and ensure that plan meets the needs of the child, this may include a plan for the child to be removed from the care of their parents and family.

Following the legislative changes in the Children and Families Act in 2014, revised statutory guidance titled 'Court Orders and Pre-proceedings' was published in April 2014. This guidance sets out the steps a local authority should take before issuing care proceedings and stresses the importance of identifying and assessing wider family members and friends as alternative carers to explore all options to keep the child within the care of the family if possible - where that is in the child's best interests. The link to the statutory guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-court-orders--2>.

Tackling racial bias and discrimination in social work and family justice decision making

Local authority children's social care services *must* follow the [Equality Act 2010](#), as they are public bodies subject to the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#), requiring them to proactively eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and make reasonable adjustments for children and families with protected characteristics like disability, age, race and religion. This means they have a positive duty to ensure services are accessible and fair for all children, considering their diverse needs and background.

The Children's Social Care National Framework

The [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) is statutory guidance that sets out the purpose, principles and enablers of good practice in children's social care and the outcomes that should be achieved. It helps everyone supporting children, young people and families to understand what is expected of their work.

A key enabler that facilitates effective support for children, young people and families is for leaders to drive conditions for effective practice. The National Framework formulates clear expectations of senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners to address discrimination and promote equality through their work, whether they are leading services or modelling good practice to their peers.

The National Framework expects all practitioners to be mindful of how discrimination affects how children, young people and families experience support from children's social care. They should recognise that different experiences may affect how individuals engage with children's social care and how their own professional beliefs, views and expectations may influence their practice and decision making.

In 2026, the UK Government is updating the National Framework, to ensure it reflects the reforms underway across children's social care and reaffirms its role as key statutory guidance.

Social work practice



UK Mission to the
United Nations
in Geneva

Anti-discriminatory practice is a legal and professional requirement. Social workers must treat people fairly, challenge inequality, and respect individual identity. This includes recognising how discrimination affects children and families. Social Work England's professional standards expect social workers to value diversity, respect individual identity, and work with community systems.

In addition to this, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a public consultation on a new set of social worker early standards (ECS), which closed on 28 May 2025, to help social workers to better support all vulnerable families and children, regardless of their background. The new ECS include a domain on anti-discriminatory practice which is fundamental to all areas of social work practice, given a social worker's role in challenging inequality and discrimination experienced by the families they work with. The ECS will help social workers meet these responsibilities and deliver safe, effective support to everyone.

Family Justice

The DfE is working alongside partners across the family justice system, including the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), HM Courts and Tribunals Service, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and the Judiciary to develop a joint family justice and data strategy, responding to recommendations of the National Audit Report into Family Justice System Improvements.

A central priority of this work is strengthening the collection and use of protected characteristics data across all stages of proceedings, including the pre-proceedings phase. This will be reflected in the forthcoming strategy. Through the Family Justice Board, co-chaired by DfE and MoJ Ministers, and its dedicated data subgroup, partners are working together to identify and address gaps in the information we hold about children and families. This includes improving our ability to understand and respond to racial and regional disparities, ensuring that no child or family experiences differential treatment within the system.

Trauma informed approaches in child protection proceedings

In the 2023 update of multi-agency statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, the UK Government strengthened support and information for parents and carers so that they are helped to engage and feel heard, have clarity about what is expected, and feel supported about what change is needed to safely care for their children.

This included introducing a new set of principles to underpin practitioners' work with parents and carers across the system and strengthening the guidance to clarify expectations of practitioners' work with parents and carers, particularly in cases where there is a risk of significant harm and/or cases that are going through child protection.

The principles recognise the importance of working sensitively to understand the impact of adversity and trauma in the lives of children, parents and carers, and the need for practitioners to adapt their responses appropriately.

The Government will continue to strengthen the guidance in future updates.



UK Mission to the
United Nations
in Geneva

Maternal healthcare

It is a UK Government priority to ensure all women and babies receive the high-quality care they deserve, regardless of their background, location or ethnicity. The Government is taking action to address the inequalities that exist to ensure all women and babies receive safe, personalised and compassionate care. We know that this includes taking action before women reach maternity care, as well as after they go home. It also includes working to improve women's experiences in maternity and neonatal care as well as outcomes. That is why the Secretary of State has appointed Baroness Amos to lead a National Maternity and Neonatal Investigation in NHS Maternity and Neonatal services to help us understand the systemic issues behind why so many women, babies and families experience unacceptable care, which is now underway. A focus on inequalities is threaded throughout the work of the investigation. In February, Baroness Amos published an interim report detailing insights gathered so far. Her final report, including one coherent single set of national recommendations, will be published in June.

The government has also launched its new National Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce, chaired by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This Taskforce will not only develop a new national action plan, but will also hold the system to account for implementing the plan, improving outcomes and experiences, and reducing inequalities for women, babies and families.

In the meantime, rather than waiting for the Investigation to report, we are taking immediate action to boost accountability and safety. This includes tackling the leading causes of maternal mortality and morbidity. We have launched a Maternal Care Bundle, which sets clear standards across five areas of clinical care and focuses on the main causes of maternal death and harm. This codifies best practice already used across the NHS and supports greater consistency in care. We know that women from Black and Asian backgrounds are at higher risk of specific clinical conditions that contribute to these inequalities – this Bundle is designed to target these conditions, and we expect this would lead to a decline in instances of deaths and harm.