

The German Bundestag's Commission for Children's Concerns

What is the Commission for Children's Concerns?

The German Bundestag's Commission for Children's Concerns has been in existence since 1988. It is a subcommittee of the Bundestag's [Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth](#). This means that it is smaller than the committee itself and has a very special task: representing the interests of children and young people.

All regular [members of the Commission for Children's Concerns](#) also belong to the Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. This means that they are also able to represent children's interests on the Committee and have the access to the parliament as a whole which only a committee can provide.

Why is a Commission for Children's Concerns needed?

Children are particularly vulnerable members of society, especially worthy of protection. They are unable to organise themselves or assert their needs in any other way, but are dependent on their parents and political bodies taking into account their interests.

Before the Commission for Children's Concerns was created there were calls from many sides for the office of a German Bundestag Children's Commissioner to be created. Over time, each of the parliamentary groups represented in the German Bundestag nominated a Children's Commissioner.

On 21 April and 5 May 1988, the German Bundestag's Council of Elders decided to establish a Commission for Children's Concerns, made up of the Children's Commissioners from the different parliamentary groups.

This is unique in German parliamentary history and was aimed at underlining the fact that the Bundestag seeks to provide a parliamentary body dedicated wholly to children's care and welfare. Amongst other things, the Commission is intended to act as a guardian of children's interests.

What topics does the Commission deal with?

At the beginning of every electoral term, the Commission for Children's Concerns decides on a programme of work. This programme of work sets out the issues on which it intends to focus during the upcoming electoral term. In the 15th electoral term, the programme of work is as follows:

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Member of the Bundestag responsible:</u>
• Disabled children	Ms Marlene Rupprecht
• Children and health	Ms Marlene Rupprecht
• UN Convention on the Rights of the Child /Implementing the results of the World Summit for Children	Ms Marlene Rupprecht
• Children and the media	Ms Ingrid Fischbach
• Children and culture/cultural skills	Ms Ingrid Fischbach
• Early intervention/paediatrics	Ms Ingrid Fischbach
• Children and migration/integration	Ms Ekin Deligöz
• Children and nutrition/consumer protection	Ms Ekin Deligöz
• Children and education/educational science	Ms Ekin Deligöz

- Children's rights of participation Mr Klaus Haupt
- Children and road traffic Mr Klaus Haupt
- The fight against child sexual abuse Mr Klaus Haupt

The Members focus in particular on the topics for which they have been assigned special responsibility.

The Commission also deals with other topics which are referred to it as a result of ongoing political debates or current developments or by associations or children and parents who contact the Commission.

What form does the work of the Commission take in practice?

In some areas, different rules apply to the Commission for Children's Concerns than for the regular committees in the Bundestag. It can only take action, for example, if all its members have given their agreement. If no agreement is reached, individual members can seek to make progress on the issues concerned by themselves. In addition, the regular members take turns in chairing the Commission; the order in which they do so is determined by the relative strengths of the parliamentary groups.

The Commission for Children's Concerns has access to various instruments in order to represent children's interests. Here are just a few examples:

1. It can hold public hearings on topics of major importance in children's policy;

2. It can hold discussions behind closed doors with experts in order to develop opinions on relevant topics;
3. It can carry out publicity work on topics of general interest to children;
4. It can call emphatically for involvement of children and young people in society.

The Commission for Children's Concerns seeks to provide true representation of children's interests both inside and outside parliament and to provide signals in the area of child policy. As far as the resources it has in terms of time, technical possibilities and legal framework allow, it also wants to work as a partner to and promote associations, organisations and facilities striving to serve children's interests.

What the Commission cannot do, though, is to get involved in individual cases where there is a dispute between parents or other bodies on the interests of children. The Commission is sometimes asked to adjudicate in disputes over access rights, or to overturn legal judgements or influence decisions taken by youth welfare offices. But in such cases the Commission has to answer that this is not possible. Certain basic rules exist with regard to the Commission's tasks and responsibilities and these cannot be ignored.

What kind of support does the Commission for Children's Concerns need?

This description of the tasks of the Commission shows that policy on children requires strong commitment at all times. The Commission cannot do its work alone. It needs support from associations and organisations involved with children's issues and working for children's interests. The good will of all the institutions of the Bundestag is also necessary for progress to be achieved, along with large-scale use of the options available to the government.

Because of the many areas of overlap and because of the wide range of powers allocated to local-government level, the Commission would also like to see children's commissioners or children's commissions set up in as many municipalities and Land parliaments as possible.

And last but not least, the Commission for Children's Concerns needs support from children and young people actively pursuing their own interests, who want to actively shape their environment and are keen to let the Commission know where problems still exist.