

For every child, answers

30 years of research for children
at UNICEF Innocenti



UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

The Office of Research – Innocenti is UNICEF’s dedicated research centre. It undertakes research on emerging or current issues to inform the strategic directions, policies and programmes of UNICEF and its partners, shape global debates on child rights and development, and inform the global research and policy agenda for all children, and particularly for the most vulnerable.

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

For the past 30 years, UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti has probed the most pressing questions facing children, to find solutions that can help realize their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We opened our doors in 1989 - the same year the Convention was approved by the UN General Assembly - thanks to the generosity of the *Istituto degli Innocenti* – a unique, historic institution founded over 600 years ago, and possibly the world's oldest continuously operating centre of care for vulnerable children. We are immensely grateful to the *Istituto*, and equally so to the Municipality of Florence, the Regional Administration of Tuscany and the Government of Italy, for their unstinting support over the years.

The Convention, which has become the most widely-ratified human rights treaty in history, is the foundation of our work here in Florence. From its outset, the Office has supported the interpretation and application of the Convention by governments through its research and advocacy. Some of our earliest work sought to clarify terms and concepts of the Convention, such as 'the best interests of the child' and the 'evolving capacities of the child', so they could be incorporated into constitutions, legislation and policy.

We have also monitored progress on implementing the Convention's general measures, including strengthening institutions in support of children's rights. Over the years UNICEF Innocenti has compiled a unique body of knowledge on the Convention's progress, its successes, and the key obstacles in its pathway.

Ten years ago, we evolved from a small research institute focused on interpreting the Convention into UNICEF's Office of Research, overseeing this portfolio for the organization's 140-plus Country and Regional Offices. As befits an organization with a wide-ranging mandate such as UNICEF, our research portfolio is broad and diverse. The Office undertakes research on key issues for children and young people and publishes in peer review journals to inform policy and programmes. We set standards and guidelines for research governance and support field offices in commissioning research. We train UNICEF staff in robust and ethical research methodologies and governance.

Collaboration and partnerships with external research and policy institutions are central to our work. We are regularly approached by governments and universities to work in partnership with others to generate and synthesize research. One such example of this is Global Kids Online, a partnership with the London School of Economics and

20 governments and research institutions, which researches children's online activities, access and risks. Another is our partnership with the School of Social Work at the University of Hargeisa in Somaliland to research the challenges facing children and youth on the move in the Horn of Africa. The Transfer Project, which examines the impact of cash transfers in a range of countries, is a partnership with Save The Children UK, the University of North Carolina, UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, and national governments including Zambia and Malawi. Through these and other partnerships we connect to realities worldwide and amplify the results of our work.

As our work evolves over the next 30 years, emerging issues such as climate change, displacement, urbanization, mental health and technology, are assuming increasing importance to children, presenting risks and offering opportunities to realize their rights. Some established issues, such as learning and skills acquisition, will require more of our attention given slower global progress in recent years. And some areas of the world including sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, and socioeconomic groups, first and foremost the poorest, most disadvantaged and marginalized in all countries, merit greater evidence generation and research support.

We are continuously striving to improve, particularly in monitoring and understanding the impact of our research and our outreach. This is always challenging since it is often hard to link evidence and outcomes. But new methodologies are emerging that can help us, our funders and our policymakers to better understand how high-quality, ethical research on children and young people can lead to improved policies and programmes for them, and ultimately to their greater well-being.

The 30 narratives in this publication showcase the range and depth of the work UNICEF Innocenti has undertaken over three decades of existence. Our staff and consultants who undertake this work, lie at the heart of our office, and we are immensely grateful to them for their dedication and expertise. In everything we do, our overarching objective is to seek answers to the most pressing challenges for children, and to make the Convention of the Rights of the Child a living reality for every child.



Priscilla Idele

Director a.i.
UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

The background is a solid blue color with several thick, white, curved lines that sweep across the top and right side of the image, creating a sense of motion and depth.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

We brought into crisp focus legal terms and concepts that were well meaning but somewhat fuzzy.



CHILD RIGHTS

Why do they matter?

There was a time when children were not seen as individuals with their own rights. They were not even seen as children, but as little adults. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified United Nations convention and the cornerstone of all our work, was the ultimate step in a lengthy process that finally made it possible to recognize children as rights-holders and active agents in society. The Convention sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. For the Convention to be effective, its 196 signatories had to pass legislation and set up institutions to implement it, and monitor its progress. This was crucial to ensuring that the Convention would not be an empty promise to the world's children.

What have we done?

The Convention came into force the same year our office was founded. Research, analysis and study of the Convention were among our top priorities. We looked at the central principles and provisions of the Convention, which had important implications for stakeholders. Some of the world's most renowned experts on child rights worked with us on key publications: Philip Alston on *The Best Interests of the Child*; James Himes on resource mobilization for Convention implementation; Roger Hart on child

participation; Gerison Lansdown on the evolving capacities of the child; and Nigel Cantwell on the best interests of the child in intercountry adoption. Our analytical work over many years has been complemented more recently by research on the challenges to child rights arising from the rapid growth of children's internet use; on national child rights governance capacity; and on the ethics of rights-based approaches to research involving children and the use of big data and social media profiles to gather evidence on children.

What is the impact?

We have contributed to the work of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in interpreting its provisions and translating them into general comments. We helped to prepare the handbook for its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Our analysis of law reform and implementation costs has been translated into six languages and has been used in Canada and South Africa for budgeting and planning purposes. Our thesaurus and glossary remain unique tools in the international discourse on child rights, making the Convention more accessible to legal experts, academics, researchers and governments as they draft legislation to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Photo caption: Balloons flutter from a steel fence in Istanbul, Turkey (2019). 'Floating dreams' was taken by a 16-year-old participant in a project for Turkish and Syrian adolescents, aimed at using photography to learn about sharing and contributing to social cohesion. © UNICEF/UN0322282/Masri



BIRTH REGISTRATION

Why does it matter?

It seems like such a simple thing: A child is born, the birth is registered with the civil authorities, and the child becomes a legal person in her or his own right. Yet, more than 200 million children under the age of 5 worldwide are shut out of society. In 2015, it was estimated that less than seven per cent of children in Somaliland were registered, one of the lowest rates in the world largely due to the disintegration of civil registration systems caused by war. Without proof of age, children have a more difficult time asserting their rights and are more vulnerable to forced labour, child trafficking and child marriage. It may prevent them from being enrolled in school or sitting exams. Governments need proper statistics to set health and education policy and track progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. Birth registration is every child's right and a stepping stone to enjoying other rights.

What have we done?

could be dismantled – at least partially. This study drew on the expertise of the European Research Network on Children and Armed Conflict (EuroChiCoNet), which we helped develop. We advocated for national legislation to create simple, accessible and non-discriminatory birth registration for all children, and for temporary, informal measures, in emergency situations and conflict. Recently, case studies on Peru and Ghana explored the role of birth registration in public service provision for children.

What is the impact?

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly set a target for universal birth registration as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, while the World Bank and World Health Organization embarked on a 10-year effort to ensure that all countries have sustainable civil registration and vital statistics. Many countries have made progress, including Brazil, which cut its proportion of unregistered births to 5.1 per cent in 2013 from more than 20 per cent a

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