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CRC30 YEARS
CONVENTION ON THE
RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



for every child, every right

The Convention on the Rights of
the Child at a crossroads

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For more information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child visit: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

Cover photograph: Nom Som Vandy, age 4, poses at his house in Okapel village, Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia. He and his mother were part of an innovative longitudinal study conducted by UNICEF to better understand the health and nutrition status of newborns, infants and young children, as well as pregnant women, in vulnerable districts in three provinces.

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Introduction



for every child, every right

The Convention on the Rights of the Child at a crossroads

INTRODUCTION

Thirty years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child at a moment of rapid global change marked by the end of apartheid, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the birth of the World Wide Web. These developments and more brought momentous and lasting evolution, as well as a sense of renewal and hope for future generations. In a reflection of that hopeful spirit, the Convention has since become the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history.

Having achieved historic progress, the Convention stands at a crossroads

The expectations raised by the Convention have been met by historic gains achieved since 1989 in many aspects of children's rights. Many of those gains are outlined in the 'Achievements' section of this report. They are sweeping and undeniable.

UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore sums it up as follows in an [open letter to the world's children](#) marking the Convention's 30th anniversary:

In the three decades following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in spite of an exploding global population, we have reduced the number of children missing out on primary school by almost 40 per cent. Three decades ago, polio paralyzed or killed almost 1,000 children every day. Today, 99 per cent of those cases have been eliminated. Many of the interventions behind this progress – such as vaccines, oral rehydration salts and better nutrition – have been practical and cost-effective. The rise of digital and mobile technology and other innovations have made it easier and more efficient to deliver critical services in hard-to-reach communities and to expand opportunities.

In other areas, however, the sense of renewal and hope for children's rights is muted. In a very real sense, the Convention stands at a crossroads. It is time to choose the path towards fully realizing its vision.

LEFT: While having fun together in Adjamé, a suburb of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, a group of girls demonstrate the bonds of childhood friendship.

Speaking during the United Nations General Assembly session in New York, Muzoon Alameh, a Syrian refugee and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, encourages young people and world leaders to work together to realize the rights of every child. “We are marching, we are campaigning and we are speaking up for ourselves,” she said.

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Significant obstacles to children’s rights remain, especially for the most vulnerable

In her open letter, Fore notes that “poverty, inequality, discrimination and distance continue to deny millions of children their rights every year, as 15,000 children under 5 still die every day, mostly from treatable diseases and other preventable causes.”

Indeed, dramatic increases in child survival and access to health care and education are diminished, to some degree, by issues of poor quality and stagnant progress at the global level in the past decade.

Stubborn challenges persist, and we (governments, civil society, development agencies, the private sector et al.) have yet to adequately address them. As a result, progress on realizing the rights of the poorest and most marginalized children has been too slow and, in some cases, is at risk of reversal. At the same time, the world’s children face alarming new threats to their survival and well-being, such as the resurgence of measles, an increase in overweight in childhood, online bullying, abuse and exploitation, and the impact of a changing climate.

Climate change and other trends cloud the future of the world’s children and demand a fundamental change of course

Much is being done to address these and many other challenges, including humanitarian crises triggered by protracted conflicts and mass migration. But we must do more, and with greater urgency. If current trends persist, in 30 years the world’s children are likely to face a much bleaker outlook. Without a fundamental change in direction, for example, climate change will be irreversible, inflicting disastrous effects on the planet and humanity well before the Convention reaches its 60th anniversary.

Food insecurity and water scarcity are likely to become realities for millions of children. Vector-borne disease will be commonplace in places where they are currently not a threat. Three quarters of the world will live in cities, but much of the urban environment will be unplanned and unfit for children’s growth and development. Millions more children will be on the move, as scarcity fosters conflict and violence, and climate change and environment degradation take their toll.

We must act now if we hope to realize the rights of every child in the decades to come

Against this backdrop, respect for human rights generally – and the rights of children, in particular – will be under duress. The Convention will remain timeless and relevant, but its impact and influence may well lessen. Progress for the poorest children will be at the greatest risk. *Unless we act now.*

This report is intended as an advocacy tool to both celebrate the achievements of the past three decades and generate dialogue on the critical work that remains. It is not a comprehensive study of the impact of the Convention on the full array of children’s rights, which would require a much wider canvas. Nonetheless, the following pages represent a rallying cry for realizing the rights of every child. They echo an appeal that youth activists like UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Muzoon Alameh have articulated powerfully.

“Children and young people are already taking a stand,” Muzoon told the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019. As a Syrian refugee and survivor of war, the 20-year-old has seen and experienced things no child should. Yet her experiences are the inspiration driving her work with other young leaders.

“We are marching, we are campaigning and we are speaking up for ourselves,” she added. “We need you to join us.”



As many of the facts and figures cited in this report indicate, the world has made impressive progress towards realizing a wide range of children's rights since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989. We rightly celebrate that achievement on the Convention's 30th anniversary. But the available data also show that progress has been slowest for children from the poorest households.

At right is a sampling of data points and trends illustrating the need for renewed efforts to protect and advance children's rights in key areas.

Key data show progress and challenges for children

Inequities in under-five mortality

Among countries with available data, children from the poorest households are, on average, twice as likely to die before they reach their fifth birthday than children from the most affluent households. In some countries, children under age 5 from the poorest households are about three times as likely to die as those from the richest households.

Immunization coverage in cities versus rural areas

Between 2012 and 2017, across a subset of 72 countries with available survey data, the rate of immunization coverage for children living in urban settings was 10 per cent higher than the rate for their counterparts in rural areas. 'Immunization coverage' here refers to children receiving three doses of the combined diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP-3) vaccine and at least one dose of the measles vaccine.

Mixed results on child marriage

Although the overall prevalence of child marriage has decreased globally, data in all regions show that progress has been faster for children from the richest 20 per cent of households, while progress has been slower among children from the poorest quintile. In some countries – the most extreme examples – children may even be at a somewhat higher risk of child marriage today than children were three decades ago.

Gaps in measles immunization coverage

Even though childhood immunization coverage against DTP-3 and measles reached 86 per cent globally in 2018, nearly 20 million children were still at risk of contracting vaccine-preventable diseases. Survey data from 36 sub-Saharan countries between 2012 and 2017 indicate that 85 per cent of children from the region's richest households received at least one dose of measles vaccine, compared with around one half of those from the poorest households.

Urban child population levels

Over the past 30 years, the number of children living in urban settings has increased by nearly one quarter, leading to concerns about available opportunities and services in cities. Globally, 43 per cent of children lived in cities in 1989, compared with nearly 55 per cent today. Regionally, East Asia and the Pacific has seen the biggest increase in the proportion of children living in cities – from one third of children in 1989 to two thirds today. The next largest increase has been in West and Central Africa, where nearly one half of children now live in cities, compared with less than one third in 1989.



Achievements



Part 1

Achievements

Since 20 November 1989, the day the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the world has made historic gains for children under age 18 in almost all aspects of their rights and lives. The Convention has also indelibly changed the way the world sees children: as rights holders. Now it is time to recommit to the Convention, and the interrelated Sustainable Development Goals, by stepping up efforts to ensure that the rights of every child are realized.

The Convention empowers all children with inalienable, indivisible rights regardless of their background or circumstances

Before the Convention came into being, disadvantaged children were often seen as objects of charity to be given what they needed to survive and develop, often at the bare minimum. The Convention changed that. It crystallized what, until then, the nations of the world had not fully acknowledged: the universal, inalienable and indivisible rights of children.

These rights are imbued at birth, cannot be taken away by legislation and are retained throughout

childhood, wherever the child may be. The Convention underlines that children are holders of their own rights, which are invested in their own person and not dependent on their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status. These rights empower children as actors in their own development, with the right to influence decisions that affect their lives, in accordance with their age and maturity.

In turn, the Convention lays the responsibility to realize children's rights on duty bearers, including families and caregivers – with ultimate accountability belonging to the governments that have endorsed and ratified the Convention.

LEFT: As the number of school-age children continues to grow in the next 30 years, particularly in Africa, it will be increasingly important to support interventions such as the accelerated school readiness programme attended by Fafi Jlnani, age 7, in Ethiopia.

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The Convention has exerted a deep influence on political, public and private life over the past three decades

Thirty years on, it is perhaps hard for many of us to imagine a world in which children's rights were not acknowledged. Such has been the influence of the Convention, which has seeped into political, public and private consciousness. Its guiding principles – non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and the right of children to express their views freely and to be heard – have proven over and over to be relevant across decades, geographies, societies and contexts.

The years since the Convention's advent have witnessed numerous constitutions, laws, policies and practices adapted to its precepts by national governments and regional bodies. Its influence is also apparent in the rhetoric that individuals, institutions and the media use to describe children, and in their treatment at home, at school and in the community. And while many challenges remain in the effort to realize children's rights, there is no doubt that the Convention has made an unprecedented impact on the protection and promotion of those rights by governments, societies and families.

In fact, the Convention is the world's most widely supported human rights treaty. That support is still imperfect, with many countries tabling reservations and exceptions to the Convention. Still, it represents a near-global consensus that childhood is a separate space from adulthood, in which a child's human rights require special attention and protection. In a rapidly changing and uncertain world, the Convention is a lodestar to guide and assess our progress in realizing the rights of its youngest citizens.

And this progress is increasingly measurable, as it must be. For although a right unrealized is still a right, it is of little use to children in need or at risk. The latter articles of the Convention itself stipulate that its normative principles and precepts must be backed up with decisive action by governments to put them into practice. Signatories to the Convention are expected to achieve tangible results for children, gauged through regular monitoring and reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Monitoring how, when, where and for whom such results are achieved, and which children are missing out, requires solid data and evidence.

Data and evidence are critical to assessing the Convention's impact on the rights and well-being of children

A primary indicator of the progress achieved since the adoption of the Convention is the under-five mortality rate (U5MR), which measures the probability of a child dying during the first five years of life. The global U5MR has fallen by about 60 per cent over the past three decades, with every region recording a reduction of more than 40 per cent. This is a phenomenal, singular achievement and a testament to the commitment and dedication of governments, civil society and families to child survival as a top priority.

Under-five mortality is known to be the result of a wide variety of inputs. Therefore, its decline reflects improvements in other areas of child survival and development, including the nutritional health and education of mothers; the level of immunization and other essential treatment to prevent and treat diseases; the availability and quality of maternal and child health services (including prenatal care); access to safe drinking water and sanitation; and the overall safety of the child's environment.

Historic advances on realizing children’s rights have occurred since the Convention’s advent

Gains in child survival and health are matched by leaps in access to schooling and enhanced protection of children from harmful practices. In 1990, almost 20 per cent of children of primary-school age were not in school; now this ratio is below 10 per cent globally. Gender disparity in access to primary education has largely disappeared in most countries, with some exceptions in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

Although access to education for children of lower-secondary age lags behind primary school access, it has improved immensely; four out of five children in this age cohort are now enrolled in education. Birth registration

– often the precursor to children’s access to essential services – has risen steadily in many low- and middle-income countries, notably in Asia.

On child protection, recent decades have seen declines in the global prevalence of girls who are married before age 18 and those who undergo female genital mutilation. We have also made advances in the adoption of national legislation intended to eliminate other forms of violence against children.

In 1988, before the Convention came into force, only three countries had prohibited corporal punishment in all settings. Today, there are 58 – a sign of enormous progress on the legislative front. However, violent discipline remains a regular occurrence in the lives of millions of children worldwide, and governments need to

redouble legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate it.

Despite these and many other successes, in terms of both influence and tangible results, the Convention stands at a crossroads as it reaches its 30th anniversary. Its relevance and purpose remain undimmed. But its realization – translating rights into results for children – has been mixed and uneven. Most disturbingly, there is emerging evidence that some of the gains made for children in the past three decades could be lost.

In light of that evidence, the remainder of this report will delve into a selected set of issues that need urgent attention. It will call for a renewed commitment to the Convention and to children. And it will advocate for specific actions in the effort to realize the rights of every child.



In 1989, UNICEF Executive Director James Grant, United Nations Under Secretary-General Jan Martensen and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Audrey Hepburn (left to right) watch as Boy Scouts place a call from United Nations headquarters in New York to the world body’s offices in Geneva to announce the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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TOP: In South Sudan, a 13-year-old boy is officially released from the ranks of an armed group in a ceremony that marks the start of the process of reintegrating him into his community (© UNICEF/UN0202133/Rich). ABOVE: South Sudanese children set down their weapons to mark their release from armed groups at a ceremony attended by more than 200 former child soldiers aged 11 to 17 (© UNICEF/UN0202138/Rich).

Strengthening the Convention through Optional Protocols

In 2000, more than a decade after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations General Assembly adopted two Optional Protocols on critical issues of growing concern: the involvement of children in armed conflict and the use of children for sale, prostitution and pornography. A large majority of United Nations Member States are parties to these Optional Protocols, both of which entered into force in 2002. A third Optional Protocol, which was adopted in 2011 and entered into force in 2014, allows children to bring complaints about violations directly to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Optional Protocols complement and add to existing treaties. They are 'optional' because governments must independently choose whether to be bound by them.

Protecting children in armed conflict

The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict requires signatories to "take all feasible measures" to ensure that members of their armed forces under the age of 18 do not take a direct part in hostilities. It further bans compulsory recruitment of children. States parties must also take legal measures to prohibit independent armed groups from recruiting and using children in conflicts.

Protecting children from sale, prostitution and pornography

The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography focuses on the criminalization of these serious violations of children's rights. It emphasizes the importance of increased public awareness and international cooperation in efforts to combat them. And it requires punishment for offenders – not only for those offering or delivering a child for purposes of sexual exploitation, transfer of organs or forced labour, but also for anyone accepting the child for these purposes.

Allowing children to submit complaints, appeals and petitions

This Protocol allows the Committee on the Rights of the Child to hear complaints that a child's rights have been violated. Children from countries that ratify the Protocol can use the treaty to seek justice if their national legal system has not been able to provide a remedy for the violation.



Challenges



Part 2

Challenges

It is sobering to consider that while we have achieved nearly universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the rights of millions of children remain unrealized. Indeed, gaps in realizing those rights have widened among and within countries, indicating that progress has not only been uneven but often inequitable. In many regions, countries and communities, the poorest and most marginalized children are falling behind. Lagging figures on various indicators of their health and well-being speak volumes about the challenges we face.

There are worrying signs that some of the gains for children achieved under the Convention are at risk of stagnation – and even reversal in a few cases

somehow, over the past decade or so, the drive for global immunization coverage has stalled.

This slowdown has yielded devastating effects – particularly for measles vaccination coverage, which has stagnated since 2010, contributing to a resurgence of the deadly disease in many countries. Almost 350,000 cases of measles were recorded in 2018, more than double the preceding year's total. Given that measles cases dropped sharply across Africa during the era of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), from 2000 through 2015, their resurgence is even more disquieting. It demands urgent investigation and action.

LEFT: Children are evacuated from Abaco Island in the Bahamas after their family's home was destroyed by Hurricane Dorian in September 2019. UNICEF sent staff and water, sanitation and health supplies to help reach families in desperate need in the aftermath of the Category 5 storm.

© UNICEF/UN0341859/Moreno Gonzalez

Consider immunization, long heralded as one of the greatest successes in the history of public health. Childhood vaccination has contributed to saving millions of children's lives, and its efficacy is well established. Since the adoption of the Convention, safe and effective vaccines have become more widely available, often free of cost to families. And yet,

In some aspects of children's rights, stagnation at the global level is alarmingly apparent

Progress on realizing children's right to education is also a cause for concern. Globally, the number of out-of-school children at the primary level has remained largely static since 2007, as increased access to primary education has barely kept pace with global child population growth – particularly in Africa. Learning outcomes, too, are at issue, as a remarkably large number of children are experiencing learning difficulties.

It is increasingly clear that children and young people are leaving school and formal education without the skills and competencies required to succeed in the competitive, globalized labour market of the twenty-first century.

In sanitation, a prerequisite for child health, progress has led to a large jump in the global population using safely managed sanitation services: from 28 per cent in 2000 to 45 per cent in 2017, the latest year for which globally comparable estimates are available. Despite this advance, only one in four countries is on track to achieve 'nearly universal' basic sanitation services by 2030. Progress is slowest in rural areas and among the poorest quintile – 20 per cent – of households.

And while the harmful practice of child marriage is in decline globally, many countries have made little or no progress. This situation reflects the challenge of addressing and changing gender norms – the standards by which societies define male and female behaviour – which are among the drivers of child marriage. Of the five countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, four have not made significant progress in the past decade. In many of the countries that have made progress on child marriage, it is limited primarily to the richest segments of society, leaving the poorest girls vulnerable.

Cultural, social, economic and political obstacles remain entrenched

In the above areas, among others, long-standing barriers of poverty, discrimination and marginalization continue to leave millions of the most disadvantaged children unreached. Armed conflicts, rising xenophobia and the global migration and refugee crisis have a devastating impact as well.

For children living in impoverished areas, both rural and urban, geographic distance from centres of prosperity also results in poorer services and outcomes. Cultural, social, economic and political obstacles often remain entrenched despite years of efforts to remove them. Conflict and humanitarian crisis disrupt services and discourage social investment. Gender gaps, while diminishing in some cases, persist in many areas of child rights that have seen strong gains, including access to sanitation and secondary education. Girls also remain at a higher risk of bias and discrimination.

In short, despite global improvements in gender equality, girls are still more likely than boys to marry as children and do unpaid work. They are also at a significantly higher risk of gender-based violence and receive less education than boys – though it is important to note that boys from disadvantaged backgrounds also confront obstacles to quality education, suffer from poor learning outcomes and are at a higher risk of homicide and gang violence.

Meanwhile, new risks to children's rights are emerging, with parents doubting the value of key interventions such as immunization, for example. Other ongoing challenges include complacency about children's rights among many governments, donors and the public, and the burgeoning youth populations of low- and middle-income countries in Africa and South Asia.

A tenuous global outlook, driven by short-term political and economic uncertainties and longer-term trends, makes the future even more uncertain. At their worst, forces such as climate change and rapid, unplanned urbanization could endanger some of the gains made for children since the Convention came into force.

It is time for a renewed commitment to the Convention and to the world's children, particularly the most disadvantaged

As we celebrate the Convention's relevance and influence, it is also imperative that we look at the gaps that remain in realizing children's rights and renew our commitment to accelerating progress, particularly for the most marginalized and disadvantaged. For amid the doubts and fears, there is hope.

There is hope in the fact that many established and emerging partners are coming together to work on such issues as the global learning crisis and proposing innovative solutions, like the Global Learning Passport, to improve educational access and quality. There is hope that if we renew our efforts

to stamp out diseases, as we have done with polio – eliminating 99 per cent of cases worldwide – we can accelerate progress despite setbacks. There is hope in the potential of digital and mobile technology, and other innovations; at their best, these tools can be used to share knowledge and solutions, facilitating the delivery of essential services to hard-to-reach, remote and marginalized communities.

Most of all, there is hope in the children and young people of the world who – like Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai – are speaking out on issues that directly affect their lives, such as climate change and protracted conflict. As they demand urgent action and propose new solutions, many of these children and young people are emboldened by Article 12 of the Convention, which articulates their right to express their views freely and

to be heard; and by Article 5, which empowers families and communities to guide their children in learning to exercise their rights, consistent with their evolving capacities.

Young people are going to have an increasingly important role in shaping the future of childhood. As such, established institutions have a responsibility – and an opportunity – to find new ways of collaborating with them and co-creating solutions and breakthroughs.

We must understand that hard-won gains for children are often easily lost or put at risk in a changing world, and that reaching the hardest-to-reach 10 per cent to 20 per cent of children is the biggest challenge of all. It is time to learn from the past, confront the challenges of the present and secure a future in which the rights of every child are realized.

Deborah Morayo Adegbile, age 12, of Nigeria, and Greta Thunberg, age 16, of Sweden (first and second from left), were among a group of children who filed a complaint to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2019, protesting a lack of government action on the climate crisis.

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2. CHALLENGES



The Convention and humanitarian action for children

Humanitarian crises bring a multitude of dangers for children. Many are forced from their homes, separated from family, deprived of food, denied education, exposed to exploitation and violence, and threatened with injury and death. Far too often, these dangers deprive children of a multitude of basic rights – including the right to education, nutritious food, protection and health.

LEFT: A child stands in a classroom destroyed in the ongoing war in Yemen. In times of crisis, education can be a lifeline for children and an opportunity for them to build a brighter future.

© UNICEF/UN073959/Clarke

Consider these stark facts

Around the world, more than one in four children live in a country affected by conflict or disaster. Refugee children forced from their homes are five times more likely to be out of school than other children. The number of verified grave violations against children in conflict has nearly tripled since 2010. Children younger than age 5 in countries experiencing protracted conflict are 20 times more likely to die from causes linked to unsafe water and sanitation than from direct violence. And amid the crisis in Yemen, about 400,000 children suffered from severe acute malnutrition in 2018.

A foundation for protecting children's rights in crises

As protracted armed conflicts and other humanitarian crises afflict increasing numbers of children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a foundation for the work of UNICEF and partners to safeguard their rights and well-being.

Article 38 of the Convention calls on states to protect and care for children affected by humanitarian crises. It reiterates that states must abide by relevant humanitarian laws that govern armed conflict and protect children younger than 15 from recruitment into armed groups and hostilities. The Convention's Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict provides additional protections (see page 9).

Core Commitments for Children

In addition to the Convention, humanitarian action for children is governed by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. This framework promotes predictable, effective and timely collective action in humanitarian crises and outlines programme commitments in nutrition, health, water, sanitation and hygiene, HIV and AIDS, education and child protection.



ISSUES



Part 3

Issues

Data and evidence are the basis for understanding our progress towards fulfilling the promise of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This chapter examines the data available for eight case examples, highlighting where progress for children is stalling or reversing – and where we must redouble efforts. These examples cover several thematic issues, but they are not an exhaustive list by any means. Instead, they are presented here to help illustrate, in broad outlines, some of the key challenges ahead.

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LEFT: Nana Doumbaya cuddles with five-month-old Malon Koita at a health centre in Guinea where the baby will receive vaccines. Childhood immunization is one of the greatest success stories in international development.

SURVIVAL

Child survival and the risks posed by poverty

Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development.*

Child mortality has fallen at historic rates since the early 1990s, but children from the poorest households still face the highest risk of dying before age 5.

The world has witnessed a stunning reduction in child mortality over the past 30 years. The numbers speak for themselves. In 1990, the year after the Convention was adopted, more than 12.5 million children died before their fifth birthday, largely due to preventable causes. By 2018, this number had fallen to just above 5 million, a reduction of about 60 per cent. Put another way, in 1990, 1 in 11 children did not reach age 5; now, the ratio is 1 in 26.

Global child deaths have more than halved since 1989, with gains made in every region and country, although disparities are widespread among and within countries

While progress on child survival has not been even across regions, or among and within countries, almost every group has seen at least some gains. All regions apart from North America have halved their under-five mortality rate since 1989 (*Figure 1*).

Even so, many children remain vulnerable. In 2018, an average of 15,000 children under 5 died every day. And while mortality has declined over the past 30 years for children from households at all wealth levels, children born in the poorest households are twice as likely to die, on average, as those in the richest (*Figure 2*). Newborns are the most vulnerable, as neonatal mortality (i.e., death in the first 28 days after birth) has declined at a

slower rate than mortality for other children under age 5. Neonatal mortality now accounts for almost half of all under-five deaths.

Children living in conflict settings are also more vulnerable; many of the countries with the highest rates of child mortality are caught up in, or have recently been affected by, armed conflict.

These disparities require urgent attention. Indeed, they are already the focus of various global, regional and national child-survival programmes. Reducing newborn and child mortality has become a top priority of primary health care systems, and eliminating preventable child deaths is a key target of the SDGs.

But in the context of rapid change, past progress is no guarantee of continued success. Threats to child survival and development abound, perhaps none more pernicious than climate change and environmental degradation – as discussed later in this chapter.

* Relevant articles of the Convention are referenced at the beginning of each subsection in this chapter. Please note that they are illustrative only; other articles may well apply to many of these complex issues. For the full text of the Convention's preamble and its 54 articles, see the Annex beginning on page 57.

FIGURE 1

The under-five mortality rate has declined by more than half since 1989

Under-five mortality rate by region, 1989 and 2018

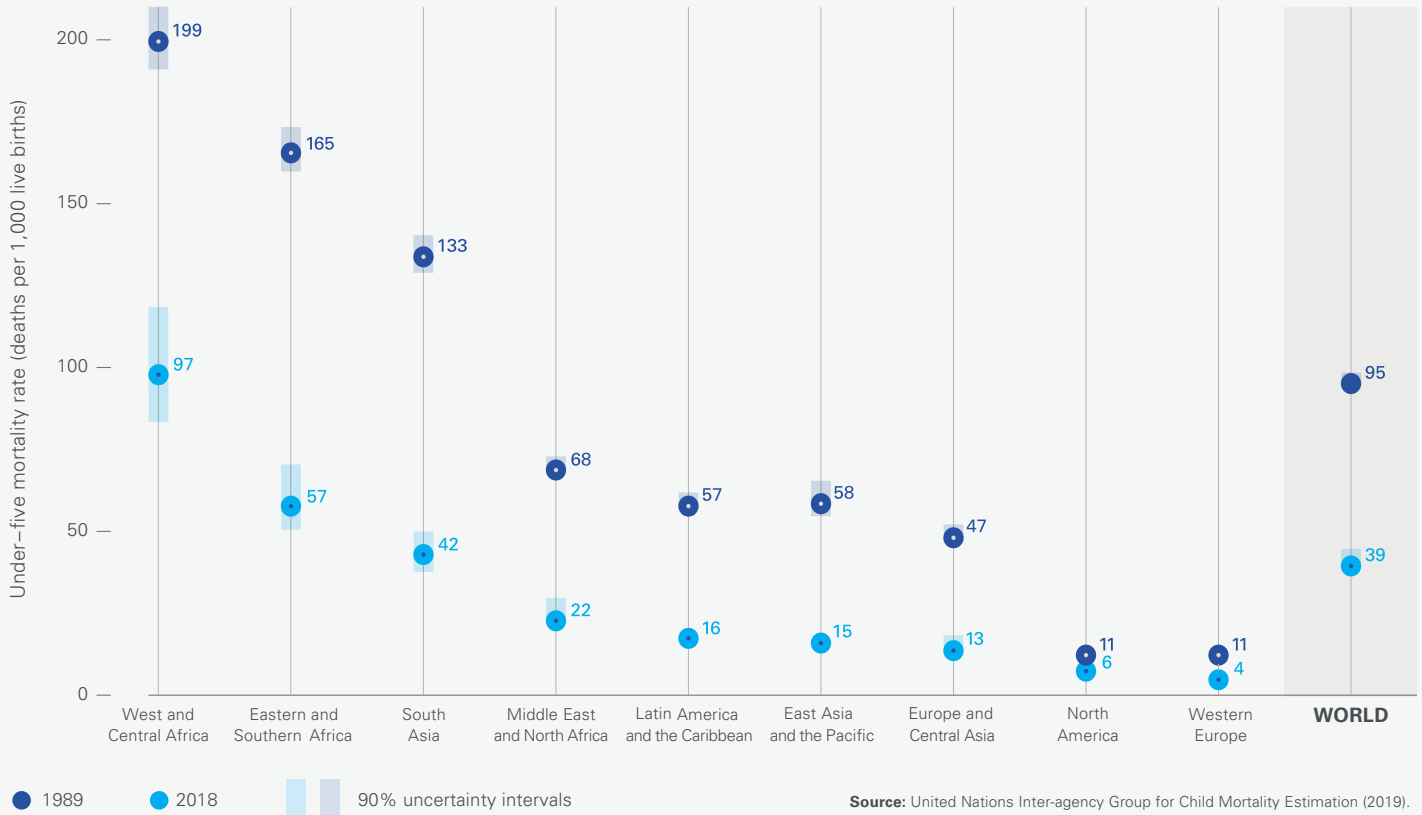
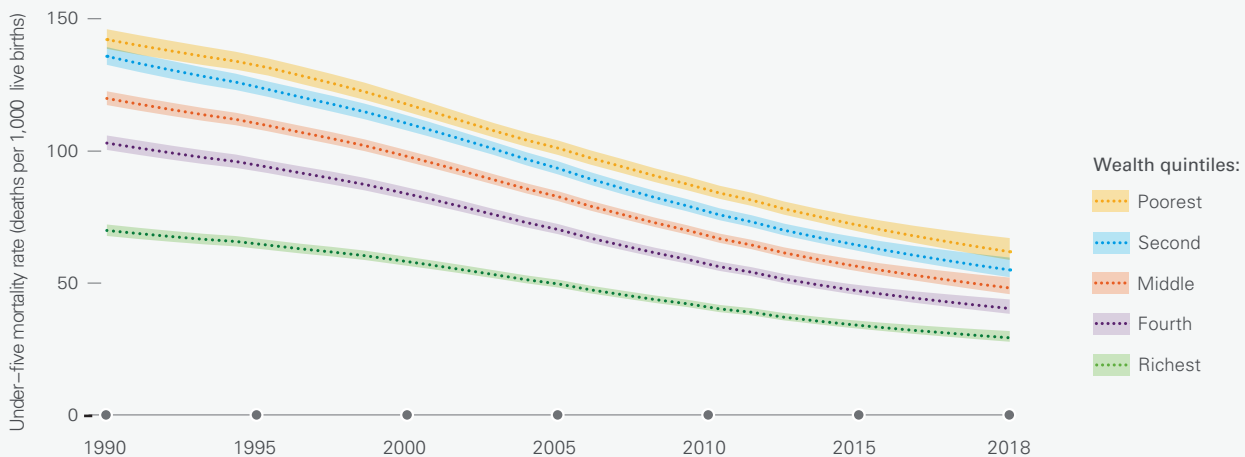


FIGURE 2

The average risk of dying remains twice as high for children born in the poorest households compared to the richest

Under-five mortality rate by wealth quintile in low- and middle-income countries, 1990–2018



Note: Shaded areas represent 90% uncertainty intervals around the median values.
 Source: UNICEF analysis based on United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, 2019.

IMMUNIZATION

Understanding the drivers of vaccine acceptance in the push for universal immunization

Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development.

Article 24 – Right to health and health care.

Childhood immunization is one of the greatest successes of international development and one of the most cost-effective interventions available. But progress has stalled globally, is uneven within and among countries, and is even declining in some places.

Childhood immunization saves lives. Prior to the introduction of vaccines, many more children died or suffered long-term disabilities from diseases such as diphtheria, measles, meningitis, pertussis, polio, tetanus and tuberculosis. Today, vaccines prevent 2 million to 3 million deaths each year by protecting individual children and creating herd immunity.

Immunization illustrates how children's rights can be realized through international and national commitment, cooperation and investment

Since the implementation of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in 1974, an increasing number of safe and effective vaccines have become widely available, often at no cost to families. The growth of vaccine deployment as a public health measure is a remarkable story of strong political commitment and reliable financing. Such support

enables countries to undertake long-term strategic planning. Expanded immunization has also benefited from efficient coordination between national governments and development partners.

As usual, however, global success does not necessarily tell the whole story. Indeed, aggregate data can mask stark, pervasive inequities in coverage at the regional level and within national and subnational territories. The recent plateauing of progress in global immunization coverage is a reminder that we cannot take continued progress for granted.



In Aden, Yemen, two children display the vaccination marks on their arms. They were part of a 2019 measles and rubella vaccination campaign supported by UNICEF. © UNICEF/UN0284429/Fadhel

Threats to progress have appeared in recent years, with millions of infants still missing out

Globally in 2018, an estimated 19.4 million infants were still missing out on routine immunization, a benchmark measure that entails a child receiving three doses of combined diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine (DTP-3). Most of these unreached children are from poor households and live in underserved communities that are either in remote locations, conflict-affected areas or urban slums.

In general, progress towards universal vaccination has stagnated, with global DTP-3 coverage increasing by only 5 percentage points in the past decade. Country-level advances have been uneven; alarmingly, some countries have experienced declining coverage in routine immunization. And yet, the work of EPI programmes is never-ending. Each year there are new birth cohorts, a growing world population and an expanding number of life-saving vaccines, increasing the number of services that countries must deliver to every child, adolescent and mother.

In some ways, it seems, the drive for universal immunization risks becoming a victim of its own success.

The great strides made since the implementation of EPI have clouded historical memory of the large-scale epidemics that previously afflicted much of the world. Perhaps success has instilled, for some, a sense that the fight against vaccine-preventable diseases is already won. This false sense of security may have contributed to health-care providers in some settings shifting their attention from routine immunization to other priorities. It may have left parents and other caregivers feeling less urgency to vaccinate their children. This trend is especially perilous when it is coupled with widespread mistrust of providers and health systems.

The resurgence of measles in many countries is alarming and demonstrates how quickly gains in child survival and development can be reversed

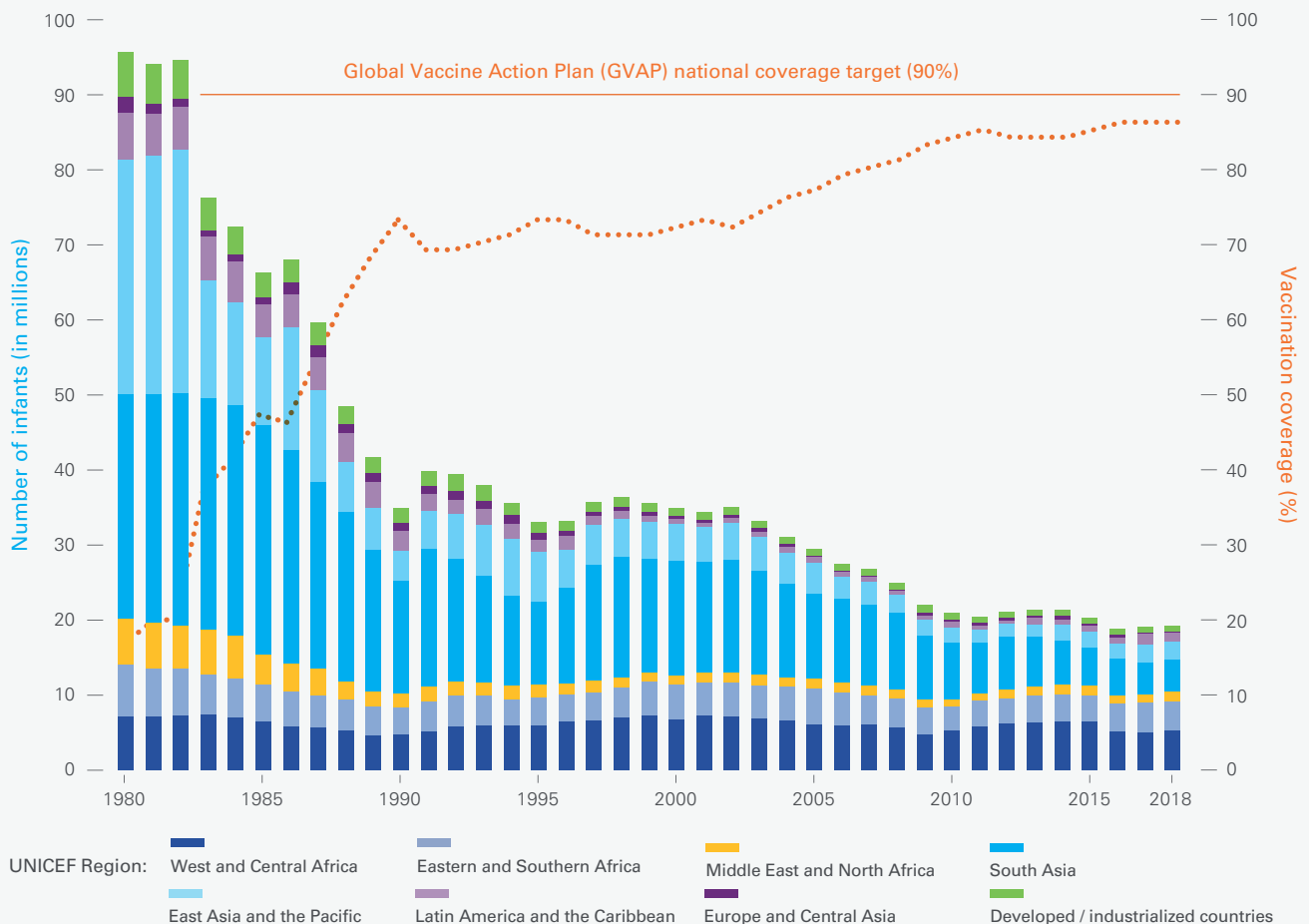
Nowhere is the impact of stalled progress more apparent than in the case of measles. We have seen a resurgence of the disease in countries where it had been

eliminated – including several high-income nations – and a rise in cases across all regions. In Europe, for example, Albania, Czechia, Greece and the United Kingdom have all lost their measles-elimination status. Meanwhile, the provisional total of 420,000 measles cases reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) from January through September 2019 far outpaces the 170,000 cases reported during the same period in 2018.

FIGURE 3

An estimated 86% of children were vaccinated against measles in 2018

Number of unvaccinated infants and national vaccination coverage trends for measles, 1980–2018



Sources: WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage, 2018. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019*.

To be sure, immunization programmes have successfully increased the number of infants vaccinated against measles in recent decades as overall vaccination coverage has expanded in every region (Figure 3). But a levelling of progress in recent years has contributed to the worrisome spike in measles cases (Figure 4).

To prevent measles outbreaks, countries must achieve and sustain at least 95 per cent coverage for the first and second doses of measles vaccine. The world is still far from achieving these targets; in 2018, global coverage totalled 86 per cent for the first dose and 69 per cent for the second. In response, UNICEF, WHO and other international agencies and organizations have stepped up efforts to help governments make vaccines more accessible and boost parental acceptance and uptake of immunization services.

Weak health systems and supply chains in many low- and middle-income countries, and rising vaccine hesitancy, have contributed to the recent dip in immunization rates

Beyond weak systems, social vulnerability and poor service delivery, an emerging threat to immunization coverage comes from the rapid amplification of misinformation about vaccines and immunization programmes on digital and social media. Misinformation creates confusion and can erode trust among caregivers and communities. In turn, it can undermine progress in reaching all children with the recommended schedule of childhood vaccines.

Faced with this challenge, WHO has declared ‘vaccine hesitancy’ – the reluctance or refusal to immunize children despite the availability of

vaccines – to be among the top 10 threats to public health. The global health community is united on the need to address this issue, but we need to better understand the underlying drivers and inhibitors of vaccination uptake.

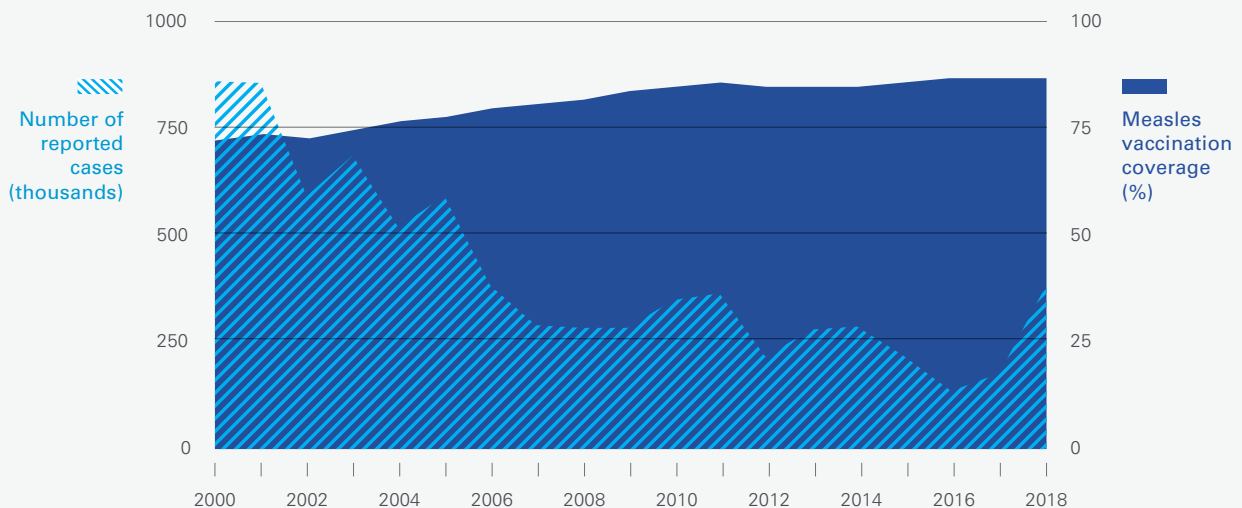
With more knowledge and innovation, we can implement global and local solutions to strengthen health systems, outreach programmes and the supply chain. The complex challenge is to extend vital immunization services to every child in locally appropriate ways, while ensuring that parents trust their providers, are confident about the safety of vaccines and have accurate information about the importance of vaccination.

Governments, the private sector, traditional and social media, international agencies and civil society all have a role to play. We must work closely together to prevent reversals of progress and realize every child’s right to immunization.

FIGURE 4

Measles cases declined markedly after 2000, but this trend may be reversing

Number of reported cases of measles (thousands) and vaccination coverage (%), 2000–2018



Source: Joint Reporting Form 2018, as of July 2019. WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage, 2018.

CLIMATE

The impact of a changing climate on children

Article 24 – Health and health services including dangers and risks of environmental pollution.

Article 29 – Aims of education including (e) Development of respect for the natural environment.

Climate change poses significant risks to children's health and well-being by heightening threats of disease, food insecurity and diminished access to safe water and sanitation.

According to scientific reports from the United Nations and other leading organizations, rising levels of greenhouse gases are contributing to higher global temperatures, altered weather patterns and more extreme weather events (*Figure 5*). These changes could cause social, economic and political upheavals, any of which might well have an impact on child mortality. However, climate change will have its most direct impact on child survival through three direct channels: changing disease environments, greater food insecurity, and threats to water and sanitation.

Changing environments will increase the burden of disease on children, particularly the youngest and most vulnerable

Rising temperatures and related changes in the environment will fundamentally shift existing disease environments in ways that we have not yet mitigated, and to which we have not yet adapted. The habitat for mosquitoes that transmit malaria, dengue fever and yellow fever will almost certainly expand, for example. So will the habitat for ticks that transmit encephalitis and Lyme disease.

These diseases already exact a terrible cost. In 2017, the latest year for which firm estimates are available, malaria alone accounted for 266,000 deaths of children under age 5 despite widespread prevention efforts. And

there could be a surge in deaths in areas that are newly affected by malaria and other diseases due to changing environments – because immunity will be less common than it is in areas afflicted by such illnesses today.

Vector-borne diseases are most likely to affect rural areas but have the potential to spread to urban centres as well. Cities are already suffering from rising levels of air pollution, which was linked to one in eight deaths of children under age 5 in a 2012 report. Air pollution is also associated with increasing rates of asthma and other respiratory diseases.

Special attention will be needed in Africa, which has the world's fastest-growing child population. But as climate change affects the entire world, health systems at the global, regional and national levels must all adapt quickly to meet this rising threat to children's health.



Rolando Ramos, age 18, helps with the family fishing business in Timor-Leste, but he also is studying for a career in medicine. "In the future, I want to be a doctor so I can help my family and my community," he said. © UNICEF/UN0186830/Soares

Greater food insecurity will threaten children's survival and development, particularly in countries and communities that already struggle with this risk

Many communities around the world have long lived with food insecurity. Climate change is likely to exacerbate the risk to these communities and threaten others that are not yet affected. Unless action is taken to slow the pace of climate change, the global food supply could come under

severe pressure in the coming years, as warmer temperatures depress crop yields. This effect is likely to be worst in the warmer regions of the global South that already struggle with food insecurity. In addition, a changing climate can exacerbate the food insecurities that inevitably accompany conflict.

Children are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Even brief periods of undernutrition can cause lifelong damage to their development and make them more vulnerable to non-communicable diseases later in life. Food insecurity also threatens maternal health, which is closely related

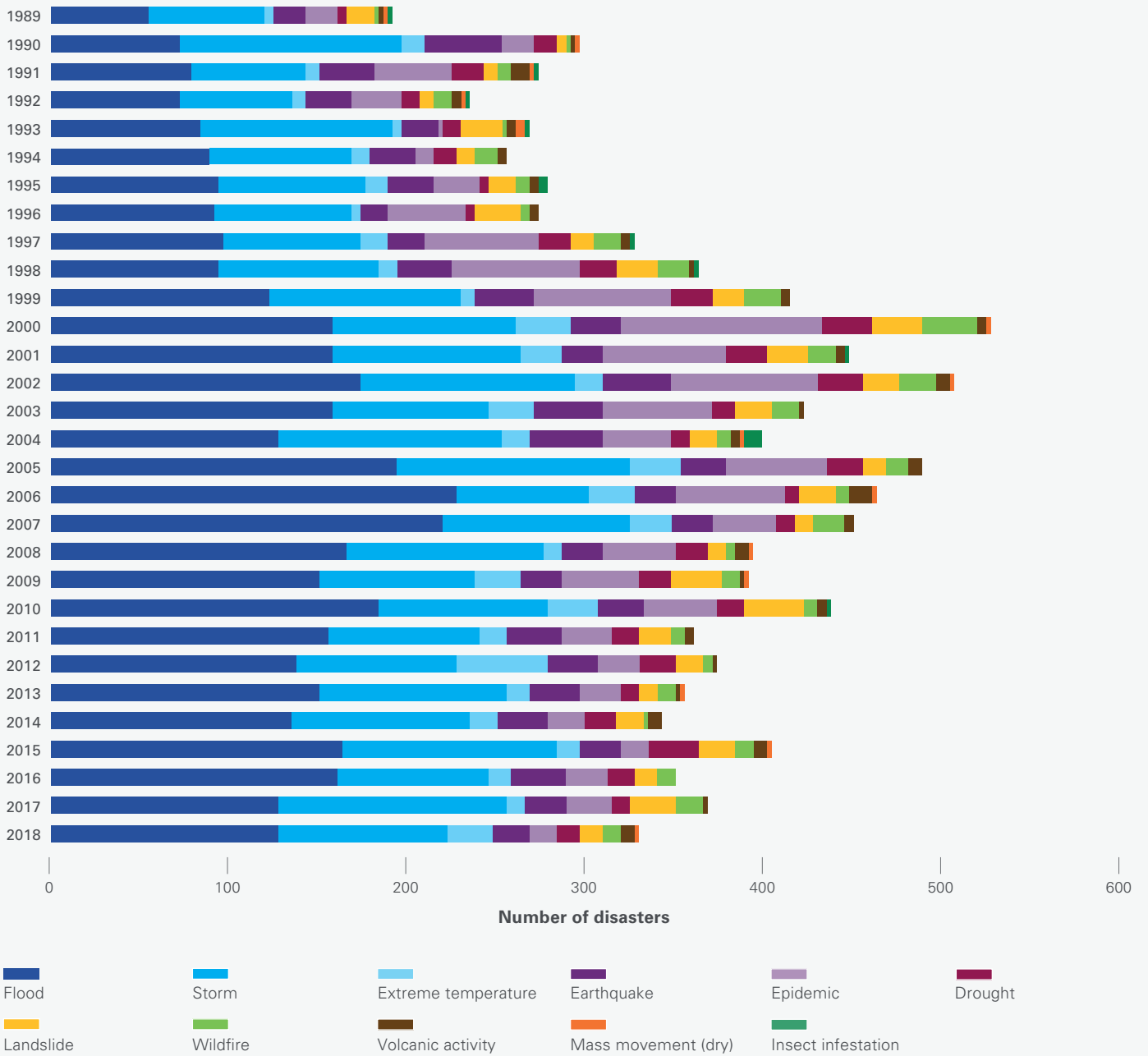
to a child's probability of surviving and thriving in the early years. WHO estimates that climate change could lead to an additional 10 million children suffering from stunting in 2050.

To avert this possibility, the international system is already working to aid regions that suffer from extreme weather events; anticipate future needs; and invest in creating more resilient agricultural systems. Such efforts must pay greater attention to the impact of increasing food insecurity on children and young people who, along with the elderly, will be among the worst affected.

FIGURE 5

Natural disasters are more frequent in recent decades than in the 1990s

Global number of natural disasters, 1989–2018



Source: Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), 2019. Brussels: University of Louvain, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), www.emdat.be

As climate change worsens, increased scarcity of safe drinking water and sanitation has the potential to undermine many gains in child survival

Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is crucial to preventing the spread of infectious disease. Advances in this sector have been a major reason for historical progress on preventing child deaths.

Despite these gains, though, more than 800 children still die every day from diarrhoeal diseases linked to inadequate water supply and poor sanitation and hygiene. Even if these diseases do not result in mortality, they contribute to other pernicious physical and cognitive effects, such as stunting, by undermining the body's ability to absorb nutrients.

Storms, floods and other extreme weather events, which are already occurring more frequently, threaten to elevate these threats to child survival and health. A 2017 UNICEF report, *Thirsting for a Future: Water and children in a changing climate*, estimated that by 2040, one in four of the world's children under 18 – some 600 million in all – will be living in areas of extremely high water stress.

With diarrhoeal diseases accounting for 440,000 deaths of children under age 5 in 2017, the stakes are high. WHO estimates that climate change could cause more than 316,000 additional annual deaths related to diarrhoeal diseases by 2050.

Ensuring WASH access amid armed conflicts presents another major challenge. There is a growing body of evidence that water is being deployed as a weapon of war, with children as the main victims. As climate change increases water scarcity, conflict can exacerbate the problem by destroying vital water and sanitation infrastructure and cutting off children and families from these essential services.

The number of children affected by water scarcity and lack of access to sanitation and hygiene services is likely to increase as climate change proceeds. Thus, countries and international organizations must prepare for the health impacts of climate change *today*. That means planning for inevitable future crises; creating systems to alert the vulnerable to impending health risks; investing in more adaptable WASH facilities; and incorporating climate resilience into existing international, national and subnational environmental health policies.

Addressing climate change, and preparing now for its impact, will be critical to protect hard-won gains in child survival

The world is just beginning to feel the impact of climate change on child mortality and morbidity. Significant damage has already been done; even under optimistic scenarios, children will pay a heavy price for a changing climate. Concerted international efforts have to confront the triple threat of higher disease burdens, food insecurity and water scarcity from wiping out gains we have made in child survival over the past 30 years.



EDUCATION

Reaching out-of-school children and improving learning for all

Article 28 – Right to education.

Getting children into primary school, particularly girls, has been among the greatest successes in human development of the past half century. But progress has stalled in the past decade.

The massive growth of primary education is one of the greatest gains for children and young people in the past three decades. The global number of out-of-school children of primary-school age dropped from 100 million in 2000 to 59 million in 2018, and proportionately from about 15 per cent to 8.2 per cent of the world's primary-school age population. Furthermore, the number of out-of-school girls fell by half between 1997 and 2018 – from 68 million to 32 million – largely eliminating gender disparity in access to primary education in most countries.

Population growth has offset gains in putting children into school globally in the past decade

Despite this remarkable progress, the out-of-school population for primary education has remained stagnant since 2007 (*Figure 6*). In percentage terms, the reduction in the number of out-of-school children has just about kept pace with the expansion in the total population of primary-school-age children, particularly in Africa but also in South Asia.

The slow pace in reducing the global out-of-school population is a cause for concern. Without faster progress, the number of children missing out on education could increase at both the primary and secondary

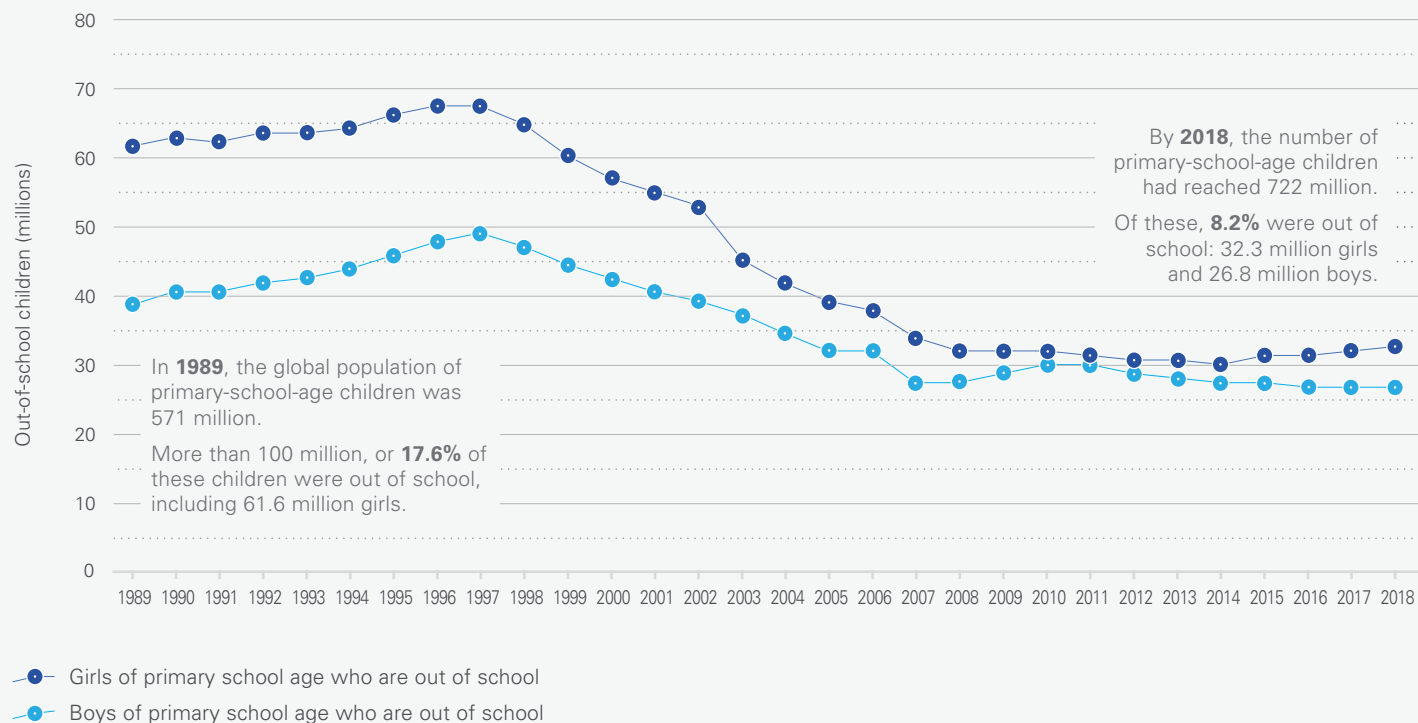
levels in Africa, where the young child and adolescent populations are expanding rapidly. Over the next 50 years, Africa will be the continent with the largest cohort of primary- and lower-secondary-school-age children in the world (*Figure 7*). Expanded investment in education and skills training is urgently required to meet this growing demand.

An estimated 1.3 million additional teachers will be needed by 2030 just to maintain the current pupil-teacher ratio in Africa. For all African countries to reach a ratio of around 23 students per teacher, an additional 5.8 million teachers will be needed. Given the large deficit of qualified secondary-school educators in Africa and elsewhere, this presents a substantial challenge.

FIGURE 6

The number of primary-school-age children out of school has declined over the past 30 years

Out-of-school girls and boys of primary school age, 1989–2018 (millions)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics and United Nations Population Division (UNPD) database, 2019

Being in school is most valuable if children really learn – and recent evidence shows that many in-school children are failing to acquire foundational skills

Stagnation in access to education comes at a time when the international community's focus has largely shifted from educational access to quality of learning. Alarming evidence that many primary school students graduate without basic skills has driven this shift (Figure 8). The importance of learning should not be understated. If children are in a classroom all day and have nothing to show for it, then much of society's investment in education is simply wasted.

And yet, there is preliminary evidence that even in the context of low-quality primary education, being in school matters. Research on this question is stymied, however, by the difficulty of reaching out-of-school children and understanding their circumstances and needs. With the introduction of a new literacy and numeracy module in the UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), we are beginning to address the data gap.

In Sierra Leone, for instance, a MICS literacy and numeracy module showed that children between the ages of 7 and 14 still had better foundational skills than their out-of-school peers even if they were receiving low-quality instruction – and even though many students who are currently out of school had *some* schooling before dropping out. This pattern suggests that there may well be value in a renewed focus on

expanding access to primary education, in conjunction with stronger efforts to solve the global learning crisis.

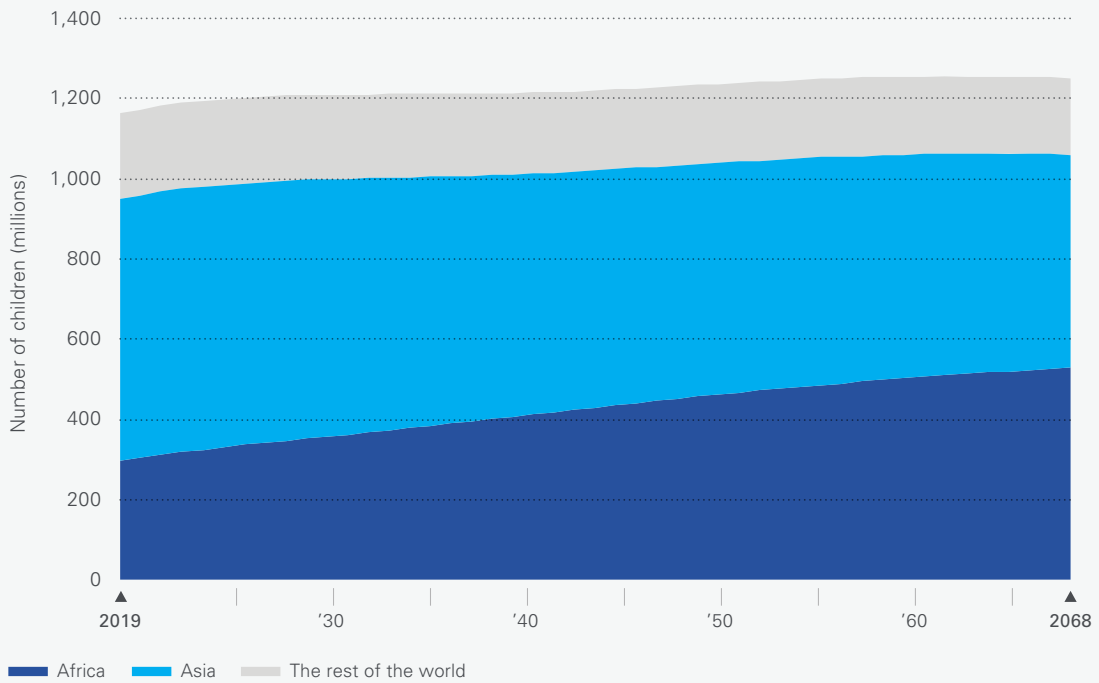
Pre-primary education is one area with massive potential to boost both educational access and quality learning. It improves learning outcomes in the longer term and helps children master foundational reading and mathematics skills in the early primary grades. Research shows that children who fall behind in these areas rarely catch up later.

Higher rates of pre-primary school attendance are correlated with lower dropout rates, reducing the number of out-of-school children. In places with no pre-primary education, instruction in Grades 1 and 2 is often of lower quality – giving children less incentive to learn and parents less reason to keep them in school.

FIGURE 7

By 2068, Africa will be home to more than 40% of the world's school-age children

Population projection of primary- and secondary-school-age children from 2019 to 2068 (millions)

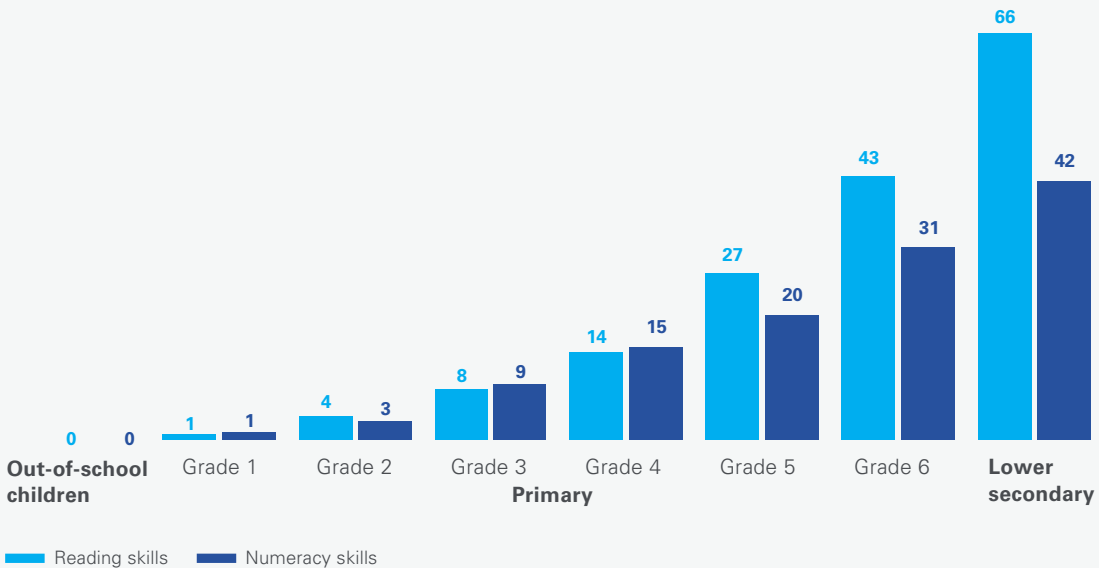


Source: UNPD database.

FIGURE 8

Many children in lower secondary school lack primary-level foundational skills

Percentage of children with foundational numeracy and literacy skills, by grade completion



Source: The Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2017.

We urgently need a renewed commitment to access, learning and investment in education, particularly for the poorest and most marginalized

Reaching the remaining 8 per cent of primary-school-age children who are out of school globally will require different strategies than the international community has deployed in the past – and a keener focus on equity. The children who remain out of school today are typically among the most marginalized, impoverished, disadvantaged and hard to reach. They are children with disabilities, children living in the streets and children from minority ethnic or religious groups. They are migrants, refugees and those who live in areas affected by armed conflicts or natural disasters.

These groups face unique challenges. For example, while wealthier households are usually more likely to send their children to school, wealth does not necessarily reduce gaps in access to education for children with disabilities. Humanitarian crises and conflict also greatly affect the number of out-of-school children in specific contexts – as in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the gross enrolment rate in lower-secondary schools dropped from 97 per cent in 2012 to 64 per cent in 2013, regressing progress by about 13 years.

Worldwide, around 39 per cent of primary-school age children who are out of school live in areas affected by conflicts and natural disasters.

Over the next 30 years, as the number of school-age children continues to grow – particularly in Africa – the international community must step up efforts to extend access to

out-of-school children as we tackle the global learning crisis. We will need targeted interventions to break down each group's unique and specific barriers to access. This will mean not only building schools and hiring teachers, but also finding innovative ways to reach marginalized populations.

We must also work harder to address the real barriers to quality education that many girls still face. This will require more efforts to tackle restrictive gender norms and practices such as child marriage, which hamper girls' access to education; make schools safe and free of violence; and provide gender-responsive school facilities and services in support of girls' health and menstrual hygiene.

For girls and boys alike, it is time for a renewed commitment to giving every child both access to primary education and opportunities to learn and develop to her or his potential.

Gifaril, age 12, sits with a younger sibling outside their grandmother's house in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, where he received psychosocial support after a series of natural disasters that made it extremely stressful for him to return to school.

© UNICEF/UNI206507



CHILD MARRIAGE

Ending a harmful practice

Article 19 – Right to protection from violence.

Article 24 – Right to health and health care.

Article 28 – Right to education.

Article 34 – Right to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

The decline of child marriage globally demonstrates the value of concerted efforts to end harmful practices against children. But progress is far from universal, and efforts must accelerate.

Child marriage is commonly defined as a formal marriage or informal union before age 18. The Convention does not contain an article specifically related to child marriage, but many of its articles are directly related to rights that child marriages tend to obstruct.

Although child marriage occurs among children of both sexes, it remains far more common for girls

Girls are six times more likely to be married before age 18 than boys. Girls from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds are most likely to be affected.

Child marriage is both a symptom and a result of deep-seated gender inequalities and restrictive gender norms, as well as poverty and a lack of economic opportunity. By effectively cutting off girls' education and career prospects, it denies them the development and life skills they need for full empowerment. It often leads to early pregnancies with associated health risks to both the girl and the infant. Since the adoption of the Convention, child marriage has become less common around the world, and progress

has accelerated in the past decade (*Figure 9*). In countries that have made progress, it correlates with enforceable legal reforms and investments in girls' education and social protection programmes. In addition, many such countries have scaled up behaviour-change interventions to shift gender norms towards girls' empowerment.

In some regions, demographic factors related to imbalanced sex ratios have resulted in a 'marriage squeeze' – in which larger numbers of marriageable men and smaller numbers of marriageable women result in a delay in the population's age at marriage.

As the international community reflects on achievements for children in the past 30 years, the experiences of the countries that have made strong progress – and those that have achieved less – should inform future efforts to eliminate child marriage.



An adolescent girl in India participates in a karate class as part of a programme to empower adolescents, including girls at risk of child marriage.
© UNICEF/UN061998/Vishwanathan

The harmful practice of child marriage is in decline globally

Macro-level factors, such as higher social expenditures, economic growth and women's empowerment, tend to be associated with lower rates of child marriage as well. These factors are mirrored at the household level, where girls and young women are far less likely to be married before age 18 if they live in wealthier, more educated households in which women have more decision-making power and higher labour-force participation.

Evidence shows that progress is possible in diverse contexts. The largest *relative* declines over the past decade have occurred in some upper-middle to high-income countries. These countries, which already had low levels of child marriage, have reduced them even closer to elimination.

The countries that have made the greatest *absolute* reductions are low- and middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia that had a high initial prevalence of child marriage. Declines in child marriage in populous nations such as India have driven the global advance.

But progress on ending child marriage remains uneven within regions and countries

Despite these gains, millions of girls around the world remain at risk of child marriage. At the national level, a number of countries have seen little or no progress and require urgent action. Even within countries that have made substantial strides against child marriage, progress is not always equal across regions.

Globally, progress to date has been stronger among the richer segments of society, and millions of girls who are among the world's poorest remain vulnerable (*Figure 10*).

Legal reforms, expanded services, girls' empowerment programmes and behaviour change are urgently needed to accelerate progress on reducing child marriage

As noted previously, the countries that have made progress towards eliminating child marriage have benefited from several key pathways.

The first pathway involves enforceable legal reforms against child marriage at the federal and state levels, and

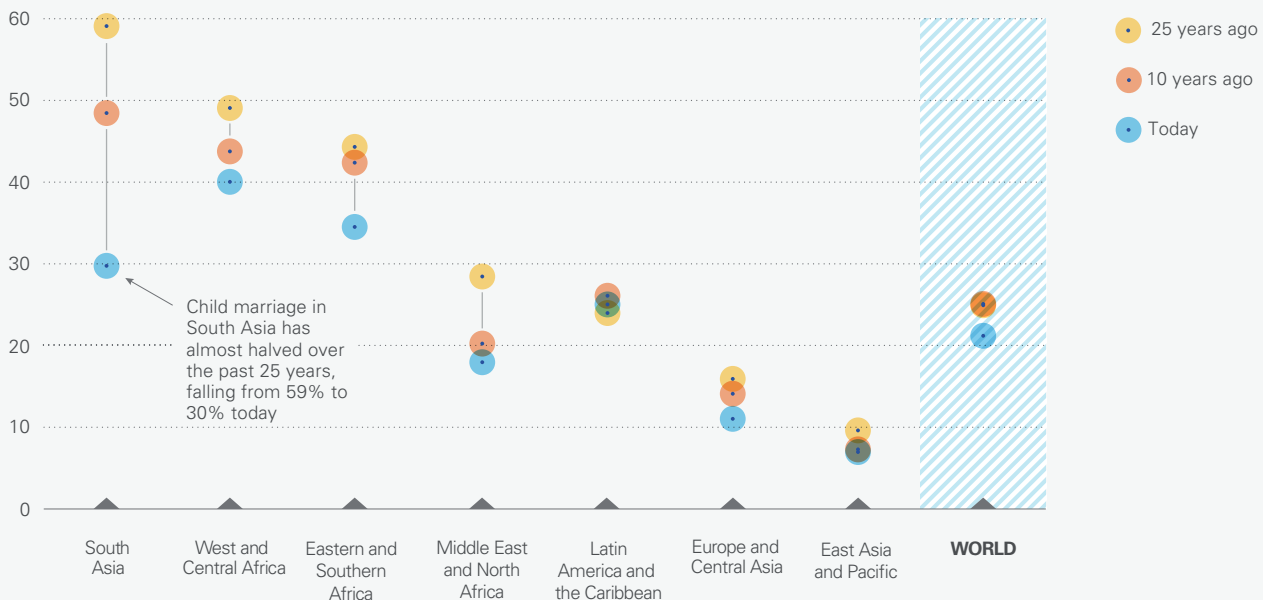
the political will to follow through with their enactment. The second entails behaviour change and pro-girl interventions at the household and community levels. And the third consists of positive household support, providing essential services in health, education and protection that empower girls to direct their own futures.

These interventions create an enabling environment; they are particularly important in places where progress towards ending child marriage has stalled or is weak. But the greatest catalyst for change – besides girls and young women

FIGURE 9

Child marriage has become less common over the past 25 years

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by region



Note: Analysis based on a subset of 97 countries with nationally representative data from 2012 to 2018, representing 62 per cent of the global population of women aged 20 to 24 years. Regional aggregates are based on at least 50 per cent population coverage. Data was insufficient to calculate regional averages for North America and Western Europe. For additional details on regional and global calculations, see *Child Marriage: Latest trends and future prospects*, UNICEF, New York 2018.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2019, based on MICS, DHS and other nationally representative sources.

themselves – is the explicit and deliberate commitment of national governments to invest in adolescent girls and pursue laws and policies that protect girls’ rights.

Legal reforms are most successful when they are accompanied by incentives to comply with the law and meaningful consequences for offenders. India, for example, provides incentives in the form of cash or in-kind transfers to families whose daughters remain unmarried until a certain age. Interventions

that address both girls and their communities are also important. Awareness and empowerment programmes are often most effective where local faith-based leaders can be persuaded to ‘lead the charge.’

But it is a combination of various approaches that has been most powerful. This combination may include enforceable legal reforms, investment in adolescent girls, and scaled-up interventions squarely addressing gender norms at the community level. No government has the wherewithal

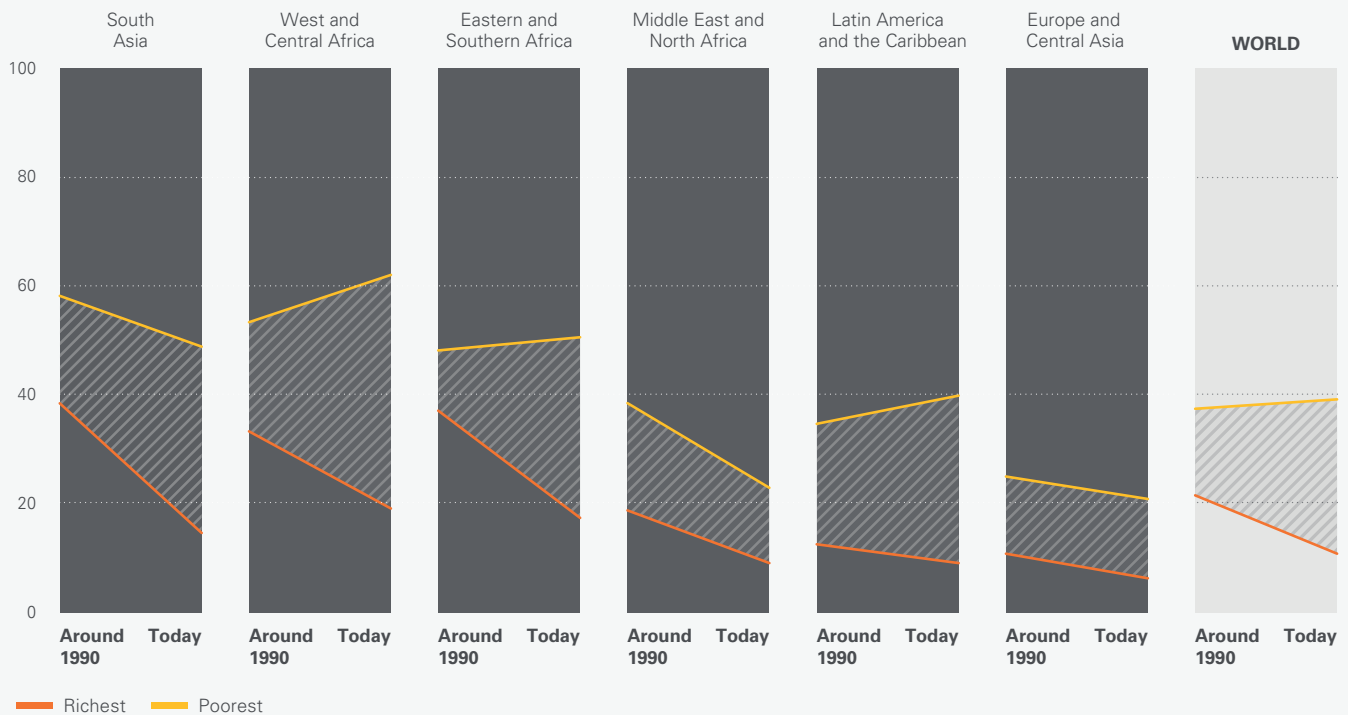
to enforce new laws on child marriage without some measure of community ownership. And no community will take seriously the business of challenging deep-set norms without firm evidence that the government is willing to support that effort.

With a strong commitment to equitable progress by both governments and communities, we will be able to leverage the lessons of the past to protect girls from the harmful practice of child marriage – and, ultimately, to eliminate it.

FIGURE 10

The gap in child marriage prevalence between the richest and poorest has widened in most parts of the world

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and region



Note: Analysis based on a subset of 101 countries with nationally representative data from 2010 to 2018, representing 63 per cent of the global population of women aged 20 to 24 years. Values for “Today” are based on the latest available data per country within the specified year range; values for “Around 1990” correspond to the level of child marriage 25 years prior. Regional aggregates are based on at least 50 per cent population coverage. Data were insufficient to calculate regional averages for East Asia and the Pacific, North America and Western Europe.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2019, based on MICS, DHS and other nationally representative sources.

The Convention and gender equality

Every child deserves to reach her or his potential, but gender inequalities in children's lives and the lives of those who care for them often hinder their life chances. Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that signatory governments shall protect children from any form of discrimination, including gender-based bias.

Children experience gender inequality in their homes and communities from an early age. Unequal household chores condition them into thinking that these duties are exclusively women's roles, for example, thereby curtailing generational change and narrowing girls' ambitions. Boys and girls who witness gender-based violence in the home are more likely to replicate violent relationships when they are adults, as either perpetrators or victims.

Lasting consequences of gender disparities

As girls and boys grow up, gender disparities and barriers widen. At age 10, boys' worlds often expand while girls' worlds contract, resulting in negative consequences that can last a lifetime.

Menstruation remains taboo in many places, and without proper awareness and assistance, the health, welfare and educational prospects of millions of adolescent girls are therefore at risk. Adolescent girls also have an increased risk of gender-based violence – including sexual harassment – in times of both peace and conflict. Article 34 of the Convention compels states to protect children “from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.”

Integrating gender equality into UNICEF's work

In line with the rights articulated in the Convention, gender equality is integrated into all areas of UNICEF's work through its Gender Action Plan.

Among many other efforts, UNICEF programmes seek to increase quality maternal care and the professionalization of the mostly female workforce of front-line community health workers. UNICEF and partners recognize and empower women in the design and delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene ecosystems. And in schools and communities across the globe, we promote strategies to prevent gender-based violence and discrimination.

Programmatic work for gender equality also focuses on increasing girls' access to secondary education and preventing child marriage and female genital mutilation. In support of all this work and more, UNICEF collects, quantifies and shares data on emerging and ongoing challenges to gender equality and girls' empowerment.

Bodoor, a 17-year-old Syrian refugee, holds up an empowering message in a UNICEF-supported Makani centre at the Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan, where she is in the 12th grade. Makani centres provide learning support and other services for vulnerable children. Bodoor and her family have lived at the Azraq camp since it opened in 2014.

© UNICEF/UN0263755/Herwig



Girls hold banners as they prepare for a group photo during a Menstrual Hygiene Day event in the KBC-1 camp for internally displaced persons in Kutkai, Shan State, Myanmar. © UNICEF/UN0337700/Oo



URBANIZATION

Urban advantages and paradoxes for children

Article 2 – All children have the rights set forth by the Convention, without discrimination of any kind.

Rapid urbanization has contributed to millions of children gaining access to essential services. But emerging data show that some children in cities are actually worse off than their counterparts in rural areas.

In general, urban dwellers are better off than their rural peers. They enjoy higher incomes and levels of education, have access to more plentiful job opportunities and markets, and benefit from better infrastructure and services. These benefits have long been understood as conferring an 'urban advantage' on people who live in cities and metropolitan areas, including children. As a result, much child survival and development programming has been focused on rural areas, where many of the poorest and most disadvantaged children reside.

On average, it is still true that children in urban centres are better off than children in rural areas on most indicators of survival and development

This narrative is borne out in the aggregate, according to a 2018 UNICEF analysis of 77 mostly low- and middle-income countries. The study examined 10 indicators of child well-being. On average, the child population in urban areas fared better than the equivalent rural cohort on every indicator (*Figure 11*).

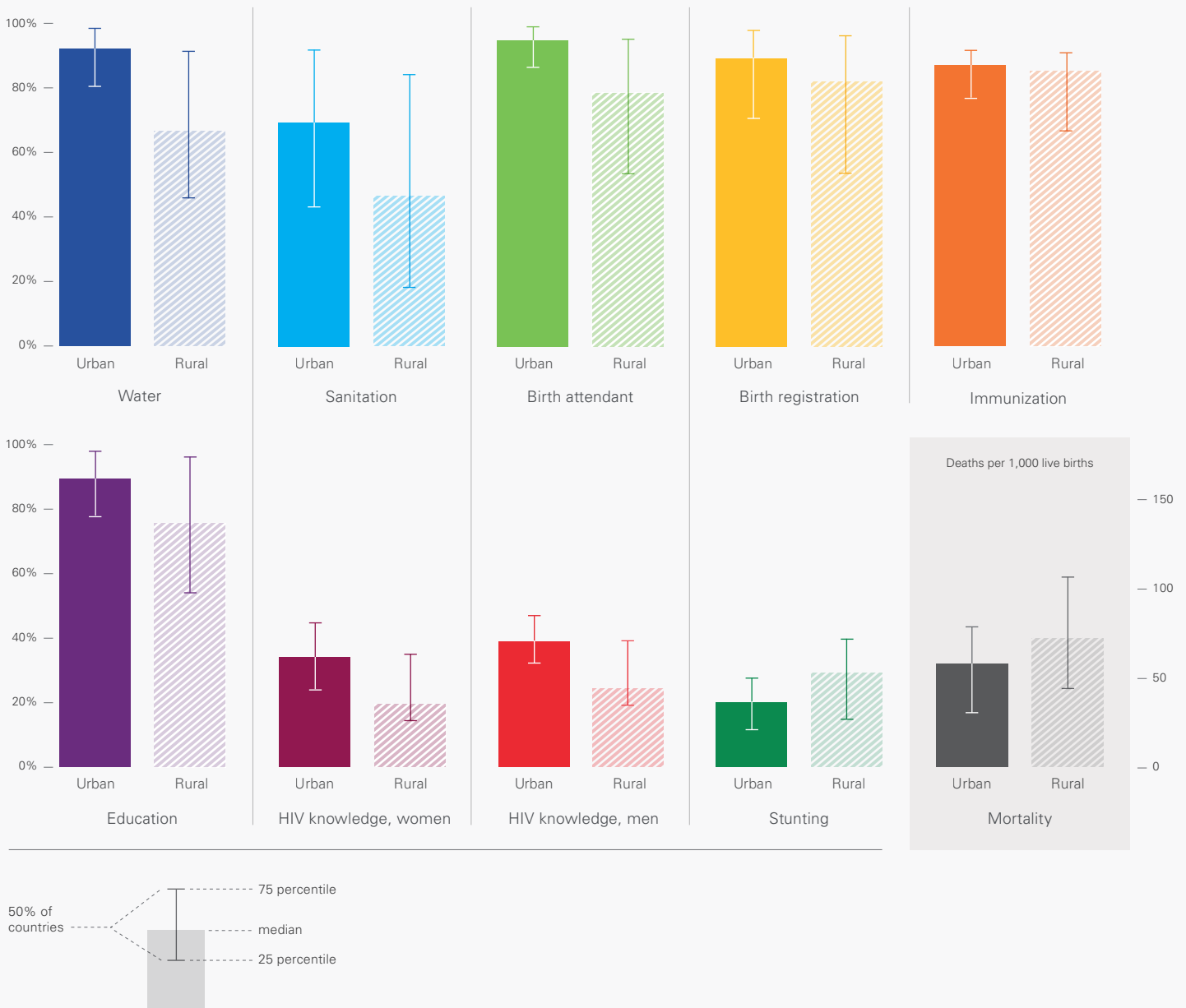
But some children in urban areas are also at the same level or worse off than their peers in rural areas

A closer look at the evidence reveals fissures in the urban advantage narrative, however. In reality, a considerable part of the child population in urban areas has been left behind, living in pockets of poverty and deprivation. UNICEF's analysis reveals enormous inequalities in urban areas, with children from households in the richest quintile enjoying a large advantage on every indicator over children from households in the poorest quintile (*Figure 12*).

FIGURE 11

On average, urban children fare better than rural across most indicators

Levels of selected indicators in countries and areas by urban/rural, 2011–2016

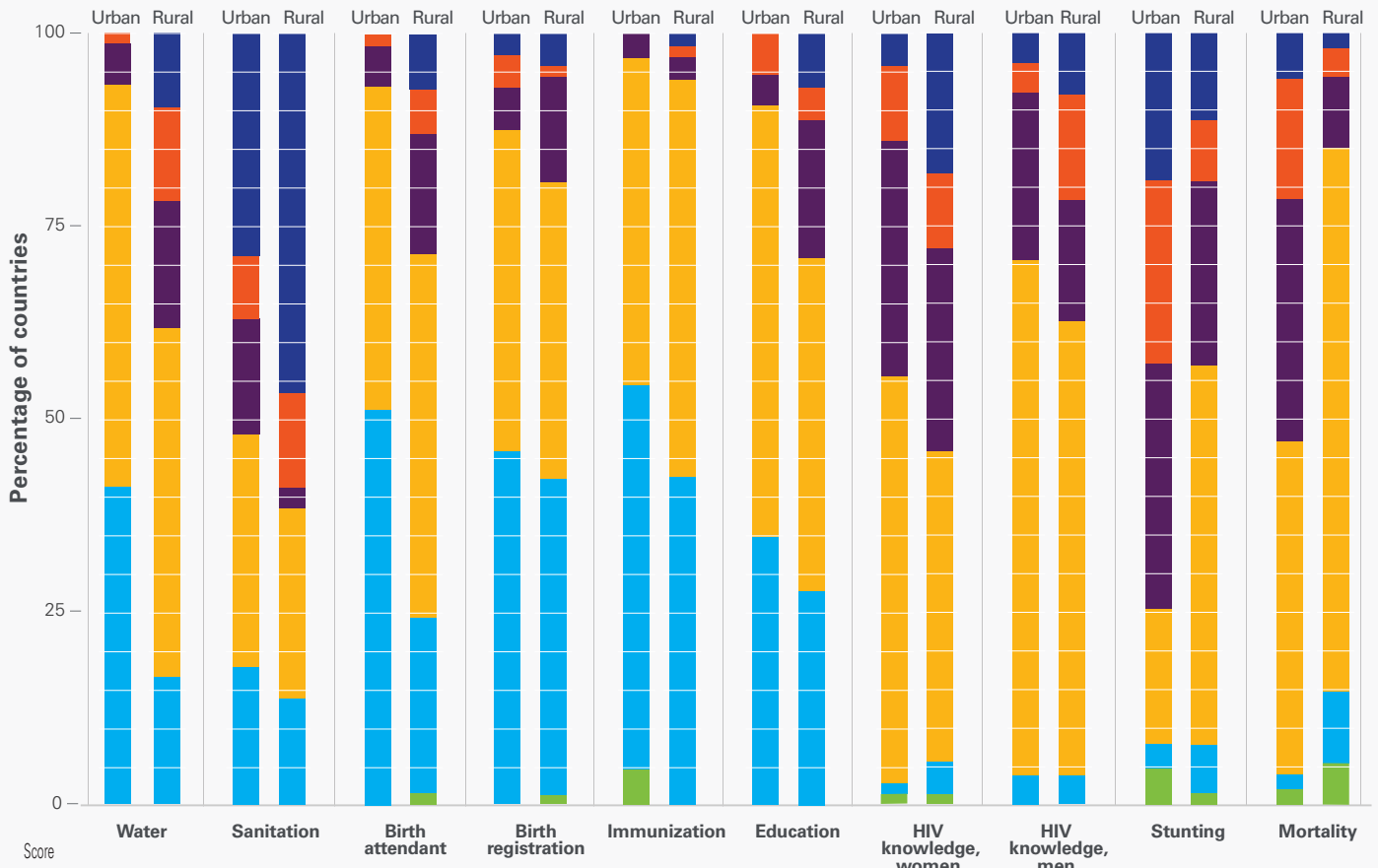


Source: Advantage or Paradox: The challenge for children and young people growing up urban, UNICEF, 2018.

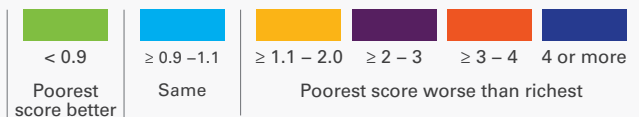
FIGURE 12

In one in five countries, stunting is at least four times as prevalent among the poorest urban children as among the wealthiest

Share of countries and areas by relative wealth disparity gap, for urban and rural, 2011–2016 (%)



Relative wealth disparity (ratio)*



* Relative wealth disparity is calculated as the ratio of the scores of the richest quintile to those of the poorest quintile – except for stunting and under-five mortality (where higher values show worse conditions), for which the ratio of scores of the poorest to the richest quintile is used.

Source: Advantage or Paradox: The challenge for children and young people growing up urban, UNICEF, 2018.

The large advantage of wealthier urban households pulls up the averages for *all* children who live in cities, giving the impression that they are better off than their rural peers. This effect is especially pronounced in cities and towns with large slums and many children living in the streets.

In half of the countries analysed, children in the poorest urban quintile are at least twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday compared to their richest urban counterparts. The disparity is even wider for stunting, which results from poor child nutrition. The prevalence of stunting among

children in the poorest urban quintile is at least twice as high as the rate among their peers in the richest quintile in 8 of 10 of the countries analysed – and at least four times higher in 2 of the 10 countries.

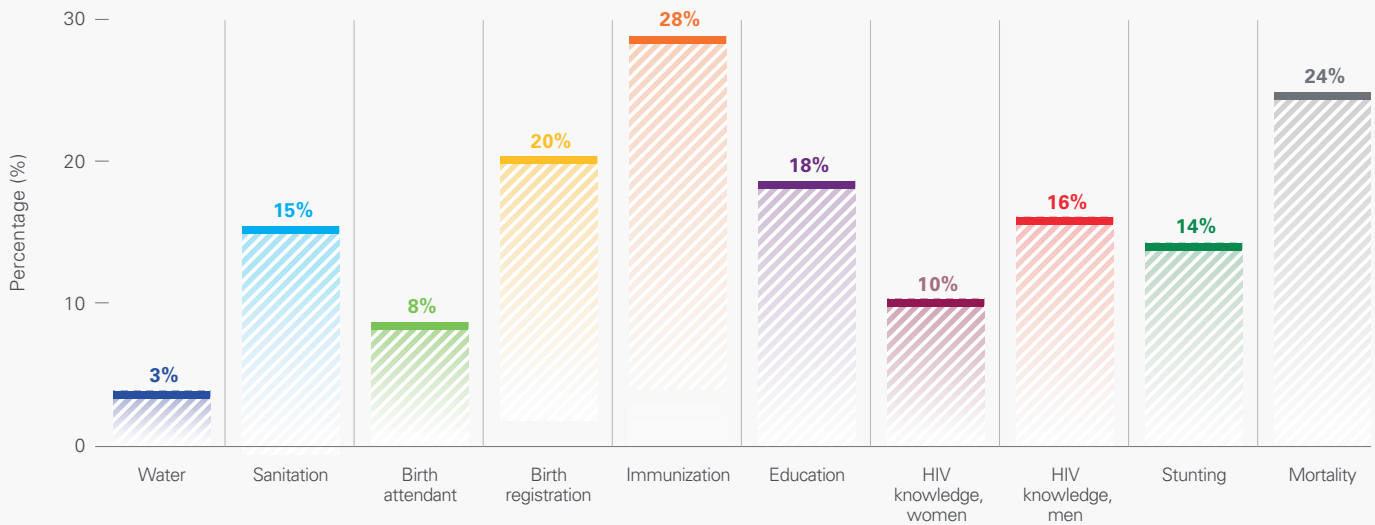
In some countries, children from the poorest urban households fare worse than their peers in rural areas (*Figure 13*). For example, in 28 per cent of the countries analysed, these children are less likely to receive routine immunization than children from the poorest rural households. This result may reflect the greater intensity of vaccination outreach in rural areas in recent decades.

In about one quarter of countries, the children in the poorest urban quintile have higher mortality rates than children from the poorest rural quintile. Globally, around 4.3 million children in urban areas face a higher risk of dying before their fifth birthday than their rural counterparts.

FIGURE 13

In one in four countries, children among the poorest urban are more likely to die before age 5 than their rural peers

Share of countries in which the poorest urban quintile fares worse than the poorest rural quintile, 2011–2016



Source: *Advantage or Paradox: The challenge for children and young people growing up urban*, UNICEF, 2018.

Intensifying urbanization in many parts of the world is likely to widen disparities for children in urban areas

Although robust causal analysis is lacking, practical experience suggests several reasons why the urban advantage does not always hold. For example, sprawling unplanned urbanization has reduced the proximity of many impoverished and marginalized urban households to jobs and essential services. The quality of services on the urban periphery is often poor; in some slum areas, services may be non-existent. In addition, informal and insecure residential status leave many urban households excluded from government-provided services.

Environmental and health hazards such as unprocessed waste and wastewater, pollution and poor air quality also heighten the risk of disease for children from the poorest urban households. Furthermore, the context in which children on the urban periphery grow up – lacking adequate housing, power,

sanitation and transportation, among other factors – serves to entrench their exclusion and disadvantage.

Finally, inadequate safeguards for workers and daily wage earners may result in parents from poor urban families working long hours and having to leave children unattended, without needed nurturing care.

To meet the Convention's vision, we must reduce inequity within and across urban and rural areas by focusing more sharply on urban human development, including the survival and development of children and young people in urban areas. SDG 11 addresses this issue with ambitious but achievable goals, as do the Habitat III goals for housing and sustainable urban development. But progress has not been as rapid as advocates hoped it would be, and it is being outpaced by intensifying urbanization in many poor nations.

The global urban population is expanding by 80 million inhabitants per year. By 2030, based on current trends, approximately 60 per cent of the world's population, or 5.2 billion

people, will live in urban areas. In Africa, the most rapidly urbanizing region, urbanization is already occurring at a lower level of national income than other regions – which makes it harder to develop efficient and sustainable urban systems.

In a worrying sign, after a decline from 2000 to 2014, the percentage of the global urban population living in slums and informal settlements has grown slightly. According to the latest estimates, more than 1 billion people live in slums worldwide, with four out of five of slum dwellers residing in Asia and Africa.

These trends suggest that the problems presented by urbanization will only grow over time. But it does not have to be this way. People move to cities for a variety of benefits: opportunity, diversity, integration, economies of scale and innovation. City governments and municipalities can and must leverage these factors to address the needs and disadvantages of their poorest residents, particularly their children and young people.

The Convention and children with disabilities

Protecting the rights of children with disabilities has been an integral part of UNICEF's programming since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the first international treaty to explicitly recognize these rights.

Article 2 of the Convention specifies that signatory states “shall respect and ensure the rights [of] each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, *disability*, birth or other status [emphasis added].”

Maria, age 17, who lives with cerebral palsy, is a successful advocate for children with disabilities in Bulgaria and has paved the way for others to benefit from more equitable educational testing opportunities.

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Marginalized and excluded

Children with disabilities are among the most marginalized and excluded groups in society. Facing daily discrimination in the form of negative attitudes and a lack of adequate policies and legislation, they are often effectively barred from realizing their rights to health care, education and even survival.

Estimates suggest that there are at least 93 million children with disabilities in the world, but the number could be much higher. They are likely to be among the poorest members of the population. They are also less likely to attend school, enjoy access to medical services or have their voices heard in society. In addition, their disabilities place them at a higher risk of physical abuse and often exclude them from receiving proper nutrition or humanitarian assistance in emergencies.

UNICEF's disability rights agenda

In recent years, UNICEF has intensified its focus on equity, working to identify and address the root causes of inequality so that all children – particularly those who face the worst deprivations – can realize their rights. Equity is at the heart of UNICEF's disability agenda. That agenda aims to mainstream disability rights across all organizational programmes and policies, and to build capacity on disability rights both within UNICEF and among its partners.

This work also gained momentum from the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in 2008 and requires that governments around the world uphold the rights and dignity of all children and adults with disabilities.





Data



Part 4

Data

Numbers matter. They form the basis of our understanding of the magnitude of both success and failure in efforts to enhance human development, including realizing the rights of children. In the absence of high-quality, timely data, critical issues do not get the priority or programme funding they warrant. Data on children and young people have proliferated in the past 30 years, but not enough to eliminate some of the most glaring and egregious gaps in knowledge on children's rights.

Addressing data gaps on children's rights is an urgent priority

The fundamental role of data in promoting accountability for children's rights has a distinguished history. In the 1990s, UNICEF pioneered time-bound and data-driven global targets for children in support of the goals formulated by the World Summit for Children. Collective efforts, led by governments together with key partners, drove rapid increases in the availability of data on children in low-income countries. These efforts resulted in the implementation of, for example, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys supported by UNICEF and the Demographic and Health Surveys

supported by the United States Agency for International Development.

Collective efforts also spurred the formation of multiple interagency bodies and partnerships focused on improving the quality and availability of data for monitoring progress towards international goals. Among these are the Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, the United Nations Interagency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, the United Nations Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-agency Group, Roll Back Malaria, UNAIDS, the World Health Organization/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage and the Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates.

LEFT: Children biking to school in Toumoudi-Sakassou, in the centre of Côte d'Ivoire.

© UNICEF/UNI211396/Dejongh

The MDGs brought data to the forefront of efforts to spur human development, but measures of equity were largely missing

A surge of interest in internationally comparable data occurred throughout the era of the MDGs, which encompassed eight global goals set largely by international agencies. Most of the goals were related to children, with 60 associated indicators measured at the national level. The MDGs were meant to be realistic, achievable, data-driven and time-bound.

Numerous advocacy-related initiatives emerged, using data to measure progress towards the MDGs and hold governments and development partners to account. A recognition of data gaps also spurred efforts to improve measurement and data availability – particularly in previously neglected areas such as early childhood development, neonatal health, adolescent health, child poverty and gender equality.

This period also witnessed the proliferation of profiles, scorecards and dashboards. These tools served to translate available data into easily understood formats and visualizations for use by decision makers, civil society organizations and advocates. The multiplicity of tools, however, sometimes resulted in unnecessary duplication and confusion about which ones should be used for what purpose and how they related to each other.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have further emphasized the importance of data in monitoring international development, given their greater ambition and far wider range of indicators

As the MDG era ended, critical appraisals arose, highlighting their top-down approach to data-driven goal setting, their lack of country and civil society involvement in conceiving ambitions and targets, and their exclusive focus on national aggregates. The advent of the SDGs, covering the period from 2016 through 2030, partially addressed these caveats. The SDGs benefited from an extensive, highly inclusive global consultation explicitly intended to ensure country and civil society ownership. They embody an ambitious, comprehensive agenda comprising 17 goals and 169 targets, with equity as a core principle.

In adopting the SDG agenda, governments have also committed to monitoring and reporting on the goals and targets through 232 globally agreed indicators (complemented by additional regionally and nationally defined indicators). There are numerous links between the SDGs and the Convention, not least in connection with child protection, which was overlooked by the MDGs. Achieving the goals would go a long way towards realizing the rights of every child.

Progress towards the global 2030 goals varies by region and country. Similarly, the *availability* of comparable data on child-focused SDG targets varies widely among and within regions (*Figure 14*).

Sub-Saharan Africa is most off-track towards meeting the targets – a dire reality for its vulnerable children. There is little consolation in the fact that it is also the region with the most complete set of data across the SDG indicators. By contrast, European countries are on track for a larger share of indicators than the nations of any other region – but Europe is the second-worst region in terms of the proportion of indicators for which data are missing.

For high-income countries, some SDG indicators measure issues that do not generally occur in these settings. In some cases, data may not be collected even though the issues exist, or data may be collected in a form that is not internationally comparable. In lower-income countries, the unavailability of data is typically attributed to weak systems and a lack of technical and financial capacity. But other factors such as coordination failures and poor data management may be equally relevant.

Whatever the reason, a scarcity of data about the situation of children constrains efforts to achieve the SDGs – and realize the rights of every child.

The SDG era presents an opportunity to enhance governance of international development data and form a long-term, ethical strategy for data collection, analysis and use

The increasingly complex data landscape of the SDG era has underscored the urgent need for enhanced data governance on international development indicators, including those that relate to the status of children. It is imperative that stakeholders coalesce around a long-term global vision and strategy for data collection and analysis. Those stakeholders are primarily national governments but also the business sector, civil society and international agencies and donors. Their vision must include strengthening information systems and building capacity to use them at the country level.

In the long run, countries that collect and monitor their own data will be better able to achieve gains and maintain accountability for children’s rights.

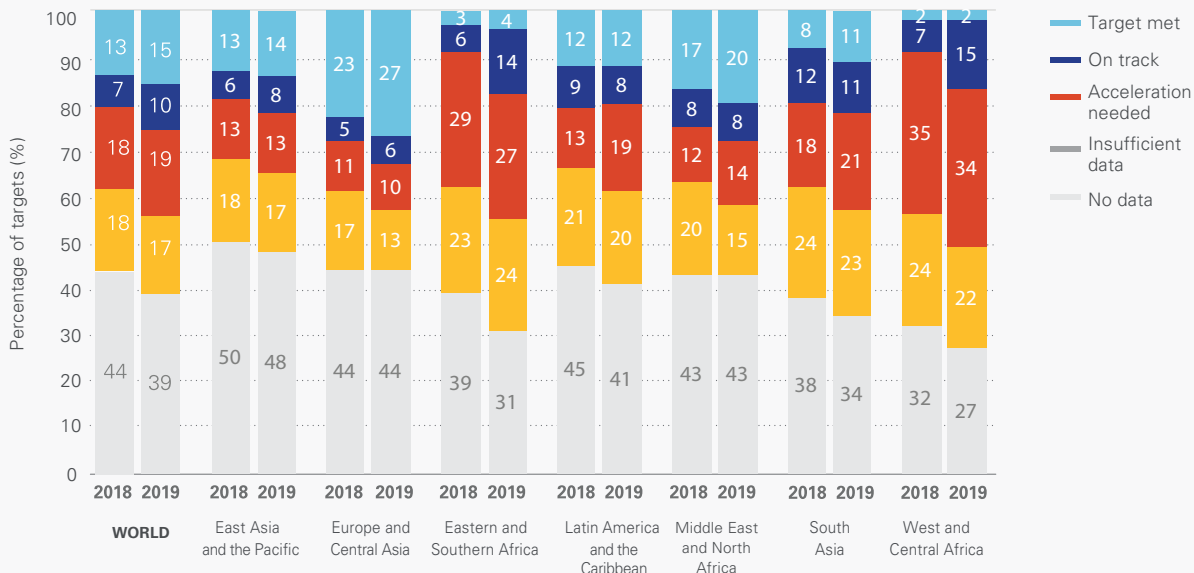
Enhanced governance of international development data should also address how countries can use non-traditional and emerging sources of information such as geospatial data, digital transaction data and unstructured textual data in combination with traditional surveys and administrative records. All these sources are needed for analyses to guide programming and planning, and for monitoring and evaluation.

Meanwhile, as children’s exposure to digital technology increases, we must be careful not to undermine their right to privacy in our efforts to guarantee other rights, such as protection from online harm and abuse.

The most vulnerable children are often the ones we know the least about. Many barriers to protecting children’s rights – such as conflict, low state capacity, insufficient resources or migration status – are also bottlenecks to collecting data. Thus, data gaps frequently occur when and where we need good data the most. Building data capacity in these settings is a crucial first step towards accelerated progress.

FIGURE 14
Progress towards the global 2030 targets

Proportion of country-indicator pairs (39 indicators for each of 202 countries) according to data availability and progress towards global 2030 targets





Investment



Part 5

Investment

While parents and families are directly and immediately responsible for the well-being and protection of children, governments also have overarching duties and responsibilities. In some cases, this means supporting families and caregivers in their guardianship of children; in others, it can include direct assistance and support to children, families and communities. Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child compels governments to protect children to “the maximum extent of their available resources, and within the framework of international cooperation.”

Public expenditure for children must reach all those who are in need or at risk

Even when governments devote ample resources to promoting and protecting children’s rights, they often fall short of providing full coverage to all children under their jurisdiction – such as those who are on the move as migrants, internally displaced persons or refugees.

And frequently, that spending is used in inefficient and ineffective ways, or is not spent as intended. As a result, it fails to support the realization of children’s rights. Therefore, the question arises: How much government spending on children is enough, and what evidence do we have about the impact of this spending on children’s rights?

Measuring government spending on children is complex due to conceptual and technical challenges

Measuring the impact of government expenditures across all child rights is a complex task for both conceptual and technical reasons.

First, we must determine what counts as spending on realizing children’s rights. Should we only include expenditures that affect children directly, or should all expenditures – even on investments in small- and medium-sized enterprises or physical infrastructure – be classified as benefiting children based on their share of the population? Frequently, this analysis is limited to public investment

LEFT: Jalaisa, age 12, and her brother Jarrer, age 13, walk through the tented evacuation site where they now live with their family in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, located in the southern Philippines. During five months of intense urban armed conflict in 2017, the family had to flee for their lives, and their home was destroyed.

in services (e.g., education, primary health care, social protection, child protection and WASH) that have a major direct impact on the well-being of children and women.

Public spending on universities, for example, is generally not classified as government expenditure related to children *per se*, as most university students are over the age of 18.

Second, we must address the reality that budget support is easier to identify for some rights than for others. For instance, securing access to health, education or WASH requires major investment in physical infrastructure, which usually can be measured through budgets. It is often more difficult to capture expenditure on child protection, which is often not as obvious. While we readily assign a cost to expenditures on services and infrastructure, it is much harder to cost out budgets for behaviour change – even though such change is essential to ensure many of the rights related to child protection.

A third consideration is the availability of budget data and classifications, and the disaggregation of data on spending. It may be necessary to distinguish between capital expenditures such as those for construction of facilities – which are often one-off outlays – and recurrent spending such as salaries. There is also a variation in the scope of spending that governments report. Some report only central government expenditures. Others use wider measures of public-sector expenditure encompassing state entities and corporations, and provincial and local government financing.

Unless public-spending data are highly disaggregated, it is virtually impossible to measure how well government budgets are reaching the most marginalized children and communities with social services. It is also very difficult to determine how equitable that spending is.

Gauging the impact of public spending on children is also challenging because data-quality issues make it difficult to isolate causal effects

Measuring the impact of public spending requires data on both spending and child outcomes, which presents a further challenge. In many countries, data availability and quality are weak, household surveys are few and administrative data are incomplete or difficult to access.

Isolating the *causal* impact of spending on child outcomes is also difficult. Statistical analyses often present linear correlations between certain public expenditures and child outcomes to make targeted advocacy points. Such analyses might argue, for example, that more or better spending on health care and education leads to better child health and learning.

But these correlations are often not robust and do not account for other contributing factors that affect child outcomes, such as economic growth or cultural dynamics. Nor do they often consider synergies and cumulative effects of investments in social sectors other than the ones under observation. For instance, safe water and good nutrition are known to be strong positive contributors to lowering childhood disease burdens for children – but spending in these sectors may not be considered in public expenditure reviews on child health.

Examining the distribution and equity of spending opens a rich vein of analysis for understanding the potential impact of public expenditures on child outcomes

Despite these limitations, it is still useful to examine associations between public spending and child outcomes based on existing data. Adding an equity dimension to the analysis can provide rich insights into a government's performance in protecting children.

As an illustration, consider a real-world analysis of the relationship between the level of government spending, the distribution of these expenditures and their potential correlation with under-five child mortality rates in 16 countries. In this case, the distribution of expenditure has been estimated using benefit incidence analysis (BIA) of public investment in health. BIA measures the share of government spending that accrues to each wealth quintile based on the utilization of services. To account for the lagged impact of investment, under-five mortality is measured (in most of the 16 countries) 5 to 10 years after the year in which the expenditure took place.

The results of the analysis (*Figure 15*) indicate that under-five mortality rates are higher in countries that invest relatively few public resources on health as a share of GDP and invest such resources in an inequitable way. These countries show a high share of public-expenditure utilization accruing to children from households in the higher wealth quintiles.

Countries that spend moderate amounts and invest those resources in moderately equitable ways have medium levels of under-five mortality. Countries that invest the most resources in the most equitable ways have the lowest under-five mortality rates. These results are consistent for expenditures on either outpatient or in-patient services, and for expenditures measured as a proportion of either the total government budget or GDP.

The above analysis suggests the critical importance of not only the amount that governments spend on child-related sectors, but also the quality and equity of that spending.

Over the next 30 years, spending on children will remain a litmus test of governments' commitment to realizing their rights and maximizing available resources for this purpose. Metrics of spending levels, trends and distribution should be included in government finance statistics. This information will enable advocates of children's rights to assess the quantity and quality of child-related public expenditures. Such assessments, in turn, will support accountability and incentivize stronger performance – particularly for the children whose rights are most at risk.

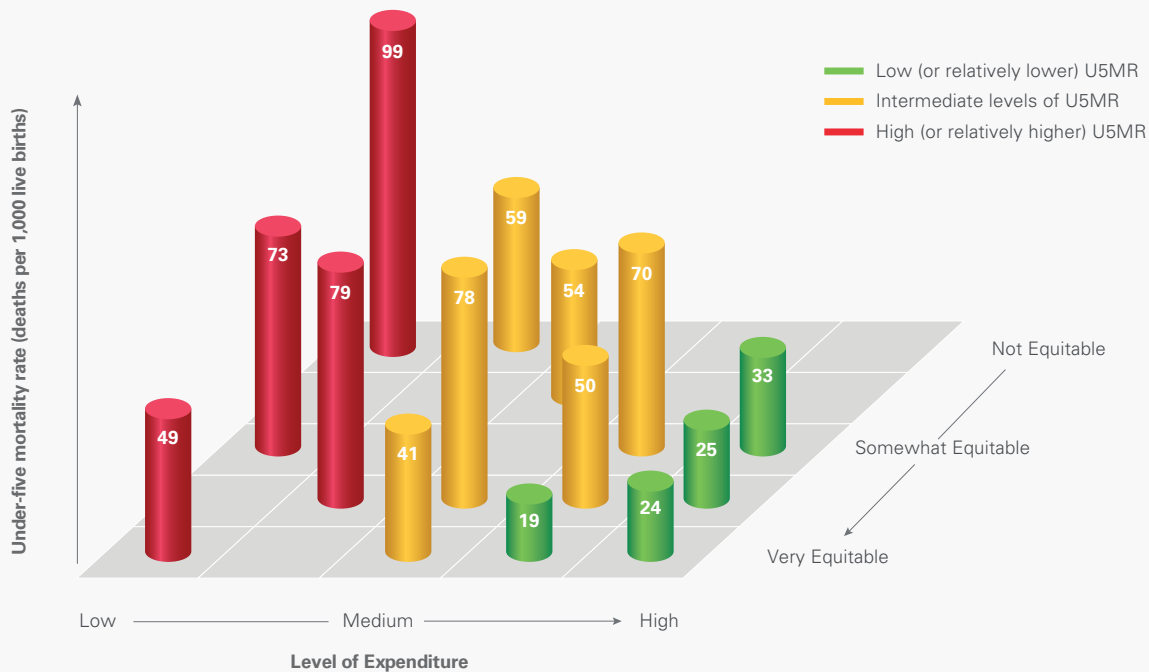
These children tend to come from the poorest households. They are already vulnerable, and they are doubly

disadvantaged if they do not obtain a fair share of public spending to help realize their rights. To the extent that public expenditures have an impact on child outcomes, governments must be sure to allocate resources where they will do the most good for vulnerable children and young people.

FIGURE 15

Under-five mortality rate is affected by both the level and equity of health expenditure

Government health expenditure and under-five mortality rates (per 1,000 live births)





Action



Part 6

Action

The 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a moment in which to celebrate the many historic gains that the world has made for children since 1989. But not all children have benefited equally, with the poorest and most disadvantaged falling behind their more fortunate peers. It is time to recommit to the Convention and step up efforts to ensure that the rights of every child are realized in the next 30 years.

The Convention, at 30, requires a new road to action

Ten years ago, when the Convention turned 20, UNICEF turned its flagship publication, *The State of the World's Children*, into a celebration of children's rights and a call to action for greater commitment to the rights of all children. At that time, the world was experiencing its worst economic crisis in 80 years. Governments were tightening their belts, and confidence was at a historic low. The crisis lingered in subsequent years and, arguably, still has not completely receded.

And yet, during that crisis, opportunities to advance children's rights abounded. Many of these opportunities were taken; hence the continued fall in under-five child mortality and

child-marriage rates, the global increase in primary and secondary school enrolment, and a narrowing of equity gaps in many child indicators – along with other successes.

The challenge issued in *The State of the World's Children* a decade ago, and one that rings as true now as it did then, was to unite government accountability for children's rights with social, institutional and individual participation. As the SDGs make clear, global and national problems require integrated, multidimensional solutions with support from a broad array of stakeholders pooling their diverse strengths and working together. While States Parties that have signed and ratified the Convention will always hold primary responsibility for its implementation, other institutions and individuals must also play their parts.

LEFT: An adolescent boy takes the stage at a World Children's Day 2018 event in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which featured 10 adolescent girls and boys from six countries in West and Central Africa. They delivered inspirational talks about the future they envision for Africa, tackling issues such as education, climate change, migration, living with disabilities, menstrual hygiene, child participation, and HIV and AIDS.

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Although the world has changed, a child is still a child

Children have long been a rallying point for the world, allowing nations to set aside their differences and self-interest to support the youngest and most vulnerable. A child is a child, wherever she or he lives, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability or socioeconomic status. Realizing the rights of every child must again become as much of a global priority as it was when the Convention was adopted.

It will take decisive action to turn this rhetoric into reality. The world has changed considerably even in the decade since UNICEF's last major flagship report on the Convention. In the preceding pages, this report has highlighted some of those changes.

The climate crisis, for example, has worsened and threatens to undermine many of the gains made for children in the past 30 years unless we take bold action. Unplanned urbanization has swelled the number of children living in slums. Demographic transition has led to sharp increases in child and youth populations in some countries and steep drops in others, each of which presents challenges to realizing children's rights. At the same time, politics has become more polarized, characterized by a sharp divergence of views about the future course of countries around the world. Technology and mobility have brought unprecedented opportunities for many, but they are not without risks or costs, and they are still failing to fully benefit millions – particularly the poorest and most marginalized.

Our challenge today is to advance the vision of the Convention in the context of these changed circumstances.

What will it take to realize the rights of every child?

Reports like this one on the rights of children and young people often end with a stirring call to action. The call usually entails some common appeals to, for example: strengthen the evidence base; apply the principles of equity and gender equality in programming; invest in what works in existing programmes and interventions; expand resources; involve young people in co-creating solutions and breakthroughs; and generate sustained political commitment and support.

All these elements are necessary to bring about change. But perhaps the stagnation and backsliding in some areas of child well-being cited in this report – and the immensity of current and future challenges – require new modalities to complement what we have called for in the past. Perhaps these are needed to truly revitalize the rights of children as a global cause.

What will it take? Will it require a child to show adults what is needed by example, making us wake up and take collective responsibility for children, as it has for climate change? Will it require a government to take bold steps, making the rights and well-being of children a number-one national priority in both words and deeds? Will it require a corporation to treat its contribution to children's futures as a business priority, accounting for that contribution on an annual basis along with revenue growth and profits? Or will it require bold new institutional arrangements to catalyse change, such as a global bill of rights – not just for those under age 18 but also extending to young people up to the age of 24?

Join UNICEF's global dialogue on fulfilling the promise of the Convention

We don't have all the answers to these questions now. But we want to find them. And so, over the next 12 months, UNICEF plans to conduct a global dialogue on what it will take to make the promise of the Convention a reality *for every child*. The discourse will be inclusive, involving children and young people, parents and caregivers, educators and social workers, communities and governments, civil society, the private sector and the media. And it will influence the way we do business in the future.

We want to know from you what it will take for us all to care just a bit more about what happens to children, others' as well as our own, and not just when a tragedy befalls them. Just as we smile when we see a small child, we need to feel empathy and compassion for the children we don't see – those who are poor and destitute, orphaned, marginalized, suffering from mental illness, unprotected, uneducated, unable to reach their potential in life. The excluded and the invisible.

The Convention is proof that the world can take bold and decisive action in support of a better future for all. When it was first proposed, many people didn't believe it would ever happen, or that the world needed a bill of rights for children. Thirty years later, it is abundantly clear that such a bill is more necessary than ever. We must reclaim the pioneering spirit of 1989. Never resting on our laurels, we must, instead, work together to ensure that the Convention remains a living document and becomes a guiding light for every country, community and family.

A note on sources

This report has been developed by the UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring; Office of Research; and Division of Communication. Besides UNICEF data and other sources cited separately in Figures 1 through 15, the report draws from a range of additional sources, including those listed at right.

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 <p>1 DEFINITION OF A CHILD</p>	 <p>2 NO DISCRIMINATION</p>	 <p>3 BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD</p>	 <p>4 MAKING RIGHTS REAL</p>	 <p>5 FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP</p>	 <p>6 LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT</p>	 <p>7 NAME AND NATIONALITY</p>
 <p>8 IDENTITY</p>	 <p>9 KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER</p>	 <p>10 CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES</p>	 <p>11 PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING</p>	 <p>12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS</p>	 <p>13 SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY</p>	 <p>14 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION</p>
 <p>15 SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS</p>	 <p>16 PROTECTION OF PRIVACY</p>	 <p>17 ACCESS TO INFORMATION</p>	 <p>18 RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS</p>	 <p>19 PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE</p>	 <p>20 CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES</p>	 <p>21 CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED</p>
 <p>22 REFUGEE CHILDREN</p>	 <p>23 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES</p>	 <p>24 HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT</p>	 <p>25 REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT</p>	 <p>26 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP</p>	 <p>27 FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME</p>	 <p>28 ACCESS TO EDUCATION</p>
 <p>29 AIMS OF EDUCATION</p>	 <p>30 MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION</p>	 <p>31 REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS</p>	 <p>32 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK</p>	 <p>33 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS</p>	 <p>34 PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE</p>	 <p>35 PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING</p>
 <p>36 PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION</p>	 <p>37 CHILDREN IN DETENTION</p>	 <p>38 PROTECTION IN WAR</p>	 <p>39 RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION</p>	 <p>40 CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW</p>	 <p>41 BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES</p>	 <p>42 EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS</p>

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HOW THE CONVENTION WORKS

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Convention,

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Bearing in mind that the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Recognizing that the United Nations has, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenants on Human Rights, proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Recalling that, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance,

Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community,

Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,

Considering that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity,

Bearing in mind that the need to extend particular care to the child has been stated in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1959 and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (in particular in articles 23 and 24), in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (in particular in article 10) and in the statutes and relevant instruments of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children,

Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth",

Recalling the provisions of the Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally; the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules); and the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, Recognizing that, in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration,

Taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child, Recognizing the importance of international co-operation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, in particular in the developing countries,

Have agreed as follows:

PART I

Article 1

For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Article 2

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Article 4

States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.

Article 5

States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the

child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 6

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Article 7

1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

2. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.

Article 8

1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.

Article 9

1. States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.

2. In any proceedings pursuant to paragraph 1 of the present article, all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known.

3. States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.

4. Where such separation results from any action initiated by a State Party, such as the detention, imprisonment, exile, deportation or death (including death arising from any cause while the person is in the custody of the State) of one or both parents or of the child, that State Party shall, upon request, provide the parents, the child or, if appropriate, another member of the family with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall of itself entail no adverse consequences for the person(s) concerned.

Article 10

1. In accordance with the obligation of States Parties under article 9, paragraph 1, applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall entail no adverse consequences for the applicants and for the members of their family.

2. A child whose parents reside in different States shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis, save in exceptional circumstances personal relations and direct contacts with both parents. Towards that end and in accordance with the obligation of States Parties under article 9, paragraph 1, States Parties shall respect the right of the child and his or her parents to leave any country, including their own, and to enter their own country. The right to leave any country shall be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and which are necessary to protect the national security, public order (*ordre public*), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 11

1. States Parties shall take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad.

2. To this end, States Parties shall promote the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements or accession to existing agreements.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals.

Article 14

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 15

1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 16

1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

2. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 17

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

To this end, States Parties shall:

- (a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;
- (b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;
- (c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;
- (d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;
- (e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18.

Article 18

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.
2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.
3. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including

sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

Article 20

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.
2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.
3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

Article 21

States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration and they shall:

- (a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary;
- (b) Recognize that inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of child's care, if the child cannot be placed in a foster or an adoptive family or cannot in any suitable manner be cared for in the child's country of origin;
- (c) Ensure that the child concerned by inter-country adoption enjoys safeguards and standards equivalent to those existing in the case of national adoption;
- (d) Take all appropriate measures to ensure that, in inter-country adoption, the placement does not result in improper financial gain for those involved in it;

(e) Promote, where appropriate, the objectives of the present article by concluding bilateral or multilateral arrangements or agreements, and endeavour, within this framework, to ensure that the placement of the child in another country is carried out by competent authorities or organs.

Article 22

1. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

2. For this purpose, States Parties shall provide, as they consider appropriate, co-operation in any efforts by the United Nations and other competent intergovernmental organizations or non-governmental organizations co-operating with the United Nations to protect and assist such a child and to trace the parents or other members of the family of any refugee child in order to obtain information necessary for reunification with his or her family. In cases where no parents or other members of the family can be found, the child shall be accorded the same protection as any other child permanently or temporarily deprived of his or her family environment for any reason, as set forth in the present Convention.

Article 23

1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

2. States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension, subject to available resources, to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care, of assistance for which application is made and which is appropriate to the child's condition and to the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child.

3. Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development

4. States Parties shall promote, in the spirit of international cooperation, the exchange of appropriate information in the field of preventive health care and of medical, psychological and functional treatment of disabled children, including dissemination of and access to information concerning methods of rehabilitation, education and vocational services, with the aim of enabling States Parties to improve their capabilities and skills and to widen their experience in these areas. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:

(a) To diminish infant and child mortality;

(b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;

(c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;

(d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;

(e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;

(f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.

3. States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.

4. States Parties undertake to promote and encourage international co-operation with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right recognized in the present article. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 25

States Parties recognize the right of a child who has been placed by the competent authorities for the purposes of care, protection or treatment of his or her physical or mental health, to a periodic review of the treatment provided to the child and all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement.

Article 26

1. States Parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law.

2. The benefits should, where appropriate, be granted, taking into account the resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child, as well as any other consideration relevant to an application for benefits made by or on behalf of the child.

Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.

3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

4. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to secure the recovery of maintenance for the child from the parents or other persons having financial responsibility for the child, both within the State Party and from abroad. In particular, where the person having financial responsibility for the child lives in a State different from that of the child, States Parties shall promote the accession to international agreements or the conclusion of such agreements, as well as the making of other appropriate arrangements.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Article 30

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 32

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:

- (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
- (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
- (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

Article 33

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

Article 34

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

Article 35

States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

Article 36

States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

Article 37

States Parties shall ensure that:

- (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;
- (b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- (c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;
- (d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

Article 38

1. States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child.
2. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.
3. States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.
4. In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.

Article 39

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

Article 40

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.
2. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of international instruments, States Parties shall, in particular, ensure that:
 - (a) No child shall be alleged as, be accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law by reason of acts or omissions that were not prohibited by national or international law at the time they were committed;
 - (b) Every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has at least the following guarantees:
 - (i) To be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law;

(ii) To be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her, and, if appropriate, through his or her parents or legal guardians, and to have legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his or her defence;

(iii) To have the matter determined without delay by a competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body in a fair hearing according to law, in the presence of legal or other appropriate assistance and, unless it is considered not to be in the best interest of the child, in particular, taking into account his or her age or situation, his or her parents or legal guardians;

(iv) Not to be compelled to give testimony or to confess guilt; to examine or have examined adverse witnesses and to obtain the participation and examination of witnesses on his or her behalf under conditions of equality;

(v) If considered to have infringed the penal law, to have this decision and any measures imposed in consequence thereof reviewed by a higher competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body according to law;

(vi) To have the free assistance of an interpreter if the child cannot understand or speak the language used;

(vii) To have his or her privacy fully respected at all stages of the proceedings.

3. States Parties shall seek to promote the establishment of laws, procedures, authorities and institutions specifically applicable to children alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law, and, in particular:

(a) The establishment of a minimum age below which children shall be presumed not to have the capacity to infringe the penal law;

(b) Whenever appropriate and desirable, measures for dealing with such children without resorting to judicial proceedings, providing that human rights and legal safeguards are fully respected.

4. A variety of dispositions, such as care, guidance and supervision orders; counselling; probation; foster care; education and vocational training programmes and other alternatives to institutional care shall be available to ensure that children are dealt with in a manner appropriate to their well-being and proportionate both to their circumstances and the offence.

Article 41

Nothing in the present Convention shall affect any provisions which are more conducive to the realization of the rights of the child and which may be contained in:

(a) The law of a State party; or

(b) International law in force for that State.

PART II

Article 42

States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

Article 43

1. For the purpose of examining the progress made by States Parties in achieving the realization of the obligations undertaken in the present Convention, there shall be established a Committee on the Rights of the Child, which shall carry out the functions hereinafter provided.

2. The Committee shall consist of eighteen experts of high moral standing and recognized competence in the field covered by this Convention.¹

3. The members of the Committee shall be elected by secret ballot from a list of persons nominated by States Parties. Each State Party may nominate one person from among its own nationals.

4. The initial election to the Committee shall be held no later than six months after the date of the entry into force of the present Convention and thereafter every second year. At least four months before the date of each election, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a letter to States Parties inviting them to submit their nominations within two months. The Secretary-General shall subsequently prepare a list in alphabetical order of all persons thus nominated, indicating States Parties which have nominated them, and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Convention.

5. The elections shall be held at meetings of States Parties convened by the Secretary-General at United Nations Headquarters. At those meetings, for which two thirds of States Parties shall constitute a quorum, the persons elected to the Committee shall be those who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of States Parties present and voting.

6. The members of the Committee shall be elected for a term of four years. They shall be eligible for re-election if renominated. The term of five of the members elected at the first election shall expire at the end of two years; immediately after the first election, the names of these five members shall be chosen by lot by the Chairman of the meeting.

¹ The members of the Committee shall be elected by States Parties from among their nationals and shall serve in their personal capacity, consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution, as well as to the principal legal systems.

7. If a member of the Committee dies or resigns or declares that for any other cause he or she can no longer perform the duties of the Committee, the State Party which nominated the member shall appoint another expert from among its nationals to serve for the remainder of the term, subject to the approval of the Committee.

8. The Committee shall establish its own rules of procedure.

9. The Committee shall elect its officers for a period of two years.

10. The meetings of the Committee shall normally be held at United Nations Headquarters or at any other convenient place as determined by the Committee. The Committee shall normally meet annually. The duration of the meetings of the Committee shall be determined, and reviewed, if necessary, by a meeting of the States Parties to the present Convention, subject to the approval of the General Assembly.

11. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee under the present Convention.

12. With the approval of the General Assembly, the members of the Committee established under the present Convention shall receive emoluments from United Nations resources on such terms and conditions as the Assembly may decide.

Article 44

1. States Parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made on the enjoyment of those rights

(a) Within two years of the entry into force of the Convention for the State Party concerned;

(b) Thereafter every five years.

2. Reports made under the present article shall indicate factors and difficulties, if any, affecting the degree of fulfilment of the obligations under the present Convention. Reports shall also contain sufficient information to provide the Committee with a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Convention in the country concerned.

3. A State Party which has submitted a comprehensive initial report to the Committee need not, in its subsequent reports submitted in accordance with paragraph 1 (b) of the present article, repeat basic information previously provided.

4. The Committee may request from States Parties further information relevant to the implementation of the Convention.

5. The Committee shall submit to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, every two years, reports on its activities.

6. States Parties shall make their reports widely available to the public in their own countries.

Article 45

In order to foster the effective implementation of the Convention and to encourage international co-operation in the field covered by the Convention:

(a) The specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund, and other United Nations organs shall be entitled to be represented at the consideration of the implementation of such provisions of the present Convention as fall within the scope of their mandate. The Committee may invite the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies as it may consider appropriate to provide expert advice on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their respective mandates. The Committee may invite the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund, and other United Nations organs to submit reports on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities;

(b) The Committee shall transmit, as it may consider appropriate, to the specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund and other competent bodies, any reports from States Parties that contain a request, or indicate a need, for technical advice or assistance, along with the Committee's observations and suggestions, if any, on these requests or indications;

(c) The Committee may recommend to the General Assembly to request the Secretary-General to undertake on its behalf studies on specific issues relating to the rights of the child;

(d) The Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on information received pursuant to articles 44 and 45 of the present Convention. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be transmitted to any State Party concerned and reported to the General Assembly, together with comments, if any, from States Parties.

PART III

Article 46

The present Convention shall be open for signature by all States.

Article 47

The present Convention is subject to ratification. Instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Article 48

The present Convention shall remain open for accession by any State. The instruments of accession shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Article 49

1. The present Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day following the date of deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession.

2. For each State ratifying or acceding to the Convention after the deposit of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession, the Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day after the deposit by such State of its instrument of ratification or accession.

Article 50

1. Any State Party may propose an amendment and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General shall thereupon communicate the proposed amendment to States Parties, with a request that they indicate whether they favour a conference of States Parties for the purpose of considering and voting upon the proposals. In the event that, within four months from the date of such communication, at least one third of the States Parties favour such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of States Parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly for approval.

2. An amendment adopted in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present article shall enter into force when it has been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of States Parties.

3. When an amendment enters into force, it shall be binding on those States Parties which have accepted it, other States Parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Convention and any earlier amendments which they have accepted.

Article 51

1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall receive and circulate to all States the text of reservations made by States at the time of ratification or accession.

2. A reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted.

3. Reservations may be withdrawn at any time by notification to that effect addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall then inform all States. Such notification shall take effect on the date on which it is received by the Secretary-General

Article 52

A State Party may denounce the present Convention by written notification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Denunciation becomes effective one year after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary-General.

Article 53

The Secretary-General of the United Nations is designated as the depositary of the present Convention.

Article 54

The original of the present Convention, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In witness thereof the undersigned plenipotentiaries, being duly authorized thereto by their respective Governments, have signed the present Convention.

OPTIONAL PROTOCOLS

In 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, addressing the involvement of children in armed conflict and the use of children for sale, prostitution and pornography; they entered into force in 2002. A third Optional Protocol was adopted in 2011 and entered into force in 2014, allowing children to bring complaints about violations directly to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. For more on the Optional Protocols, see page 9.

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Wherever he lives.
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A future.
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for every child

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