

## **Children and Youth Programme, UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster Developing a Child Rights Indicator Framework**

### **UNCRC and Committee on the Rights of the Child**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) , as adopted in 1989 and its monitoring body, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee or CRC) form the universal safeguarding system for children's rights. State parties are required to report to the CRC on a five yearly basis and the next report from the UK is due in January 2014. The OFMDFM Research Branch have commissioned the Children and Youth Programme at the UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster to develop a framework for Child Rights Indicators to provide the data analysis for the Northern Ireland input to the state report. The reporting guidelines, issued by the Committee, require state parties to present in their reports information regarding the implementation of the provisions in the Convention with particular reference to previous Committee recommendations.

The framework at present is a work in progress, and while a draft framework has been developed, it is currently going through a process of consultation with Departments, the Children's Commissioner, and key stakeholders in the children's sector in order to further refine and develop it. OFMDFM and the UNESCO team have worked closely in the development of this framework and it is part of the overall work that OFMDFM are currently driving forward in relation to reporting on the UNCRC by autumn this year.

### **Structure of Child Rights Indicators Framework**

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The UNCRC provides a normative framework for governments to monitor and realise the rights of children and young people. A child rights indicator framework should be organised according to the clusters of the UNCRC Reporting Guidelines (1991) and anchored in the normative content of the Convention interpreted by relevant articles and general comments of the Committee (UNOHCHR, 2008), including Committee Concluding Observations and recommendations (CRC, 2010). A framework of Child Rights Indicators should therefore be:

- Premised on the 42 substantive articles of the Convention;
- Incorporate the key principles of the UNCRC;
- Organised into thematic clusters to accord with UNCRC reporting framework;
- Interpreted by reference to General Comments of the Committee, where relevant.

The Convention spans many domains of a child's life, covering civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. A functional framework can therefore incorporate existing understanding of well-being into a more comprehensive set of rights based indicators (Boyce, 2005). As such, the Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services. The Convention's substantive rights can be grouped under the so called 'Three Ps', specifically, rights related to Provision, Protection and Participation (CYP, 2011). Collectively, the rights set out in the Convention are underpinned by four general principles, specifically:

- the principle of non-discrimination (art. 2);

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- the best interests of the child as a primary consideration (art. 3);
- the right of the child to life, survival and development (art. 6);
- due weight to be given to the voice of the child (art. 12).

These key underlying principles contain important messages for data collection and analysis:

1. **Non-discrimination** identifies the need to disaggregate data to ensure that no group of children are treated unfairly or discriminated against. This may mean ensuring that there is adequate data and analysis about their circumstances and experiences;
2. **best interests** principle places an obligation on legislative and policy makers to give primary consideration to whether a decision will have an impact on children's lives, to assess what that impact will be, and to elevate children's interests in the final decision;
3. Data includes **children's voice** on decisions impacting on their lives;
4. The maximum use of resources available (art. 4) to ensure **survival and development**.

According with the reporting guidelines, issued by the Committee, the thematic Clusters are:

- General Measures of Implementation
- General Principles
- Civil Rights and Freedoms
- Family Environment and Alternative Care
- Health and Welfare
- Education, Leisure and Culture
- Special Protection Measures

### Child Rights Indicators

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Child rights indicators have two principle objectives:

- Maintaining systematic information systems on the national conditions of children's lives, in order to plan, implement and evaluate interventions for their well-being and enjoyment of their rights; and
- Fulfilling the government's obligations as a state party to the Convention by showing the progressive achievement of children's rights.

Child rights indicators have a number of key characteristics and can be categorised as structural, process and outcome indicators. Guidance from the Committee (2003) also identifies that monitoring children's rights have five essential components:

1. **Baseline information** which provides data for a certain year or period, against which all future data can be measured to show improvements or deteriorations;
2. **A system of indicators** which can provide integrated information rather than a list of disparate information;
3. **Disaggregated data** that can show which group or groups of children have their rights violated or not achieved;
4. **Integrated age range** through which information about children can be compared between different agencies to adopt a holistic approach;
5. **Children as the unit of observation** which provide direct information about children and their lives rather than about adults or institutions.

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**Project Approach and completed work**

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To date, the development of indicators in relation to children's lives has been very much outcome focused. Relatively little concrete work has been done to date to develop child rights indicators in Northern Ireland. Indicators need to be developed by considering and assessing a range of possible sources of data and using data that is accurate, child centred, disaggregated and can be monitored over time (CRC, 2003).

With this in mind, the research adopted an inductive and purposive approach. The initial research work involved two systematic stages to the research (i) an initial scoping and mapping of high level indicators and (ii) analysis and review of indicators with reference to a variety of Departmental data, official statistics, surveys and qualitative data sources to identify gaps.

**Stage 1**

- Identified indicators were mapped against the Convention; reporting clusters and also the high level outcomes of the Children's Strategy to provide a baseline. Indicators were reviewed highlighting, *inter alia*, the data source; unit of measurement; frequency; baseline date; how it was observed to be disaggregated and, where the indicator was a strategic indicator (Spreadsheet A).
- Mapped and reviewed existing Departmental data and indicators to the Convention and eight thematic reporting clusters (Spreadsheet B). Department information was deconstructed by data source; unit of measurement; frequency; baseline; observed disaggregation; and where appropriate sample size.
- Also, government surveys were examined and formatted by data source; unit of measurement; frequency; baseline; observed disaggregation; and, where appropriate, sample size.
- Quantitative research from Stakeholders was also identified.
- Qualitative data on the views and experiences of children was identified and mapped against the relevant CRC cluster and Article. Qualitative data was also identified according to groups of children (Spreadsheet C)

**Stage 2**

- Identified gaps in existing indicators and data including how they were disaggregated and data sources to fill gaps. The indicators were mapped against the relevant CRC Cluster, Article and Concluding Observations from 2008 (Spreadsheet D).
- Indicators and data were suggested to fill gaps in specific issues including suggested disaggregation for groups of children and possible data sources. Potential indicators were also mapped against CRC Article, Concluding Observations and it was indicated whether a Structure or Process indicator existed (Spreadsheet E).
- Relevant structure and process indicators were also identified (Spreadsheet F).

**General Messages**

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- Child Rights indicators can be developed using already-existing rich data sources in NI which is often under-used.

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- Research highlights gaps and lack of data on specific issues; data has not been disaggregated for groups of children or is not available for marginalised groups
- Review of survey and research data available may help to fill some of the gaps in Departmental reporting and official statistics
- There are some gaps in indicators and data which need to be filled to meet the requirements of a child rights indicator set

**Next Steps**

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- Developing a strategic set of child rights indicators for use by OFMDFM based on Departmental indicators and other administrative and survey data;
- Engage in cluster by cluster meetings with key stakeholders to discuss rights based indicators in relation to Departmental policy and data to develop a strategic set for each cluster related the key principles of the UNCRC;
- Use the framework for UNCRC reporting and consider how any remaining gaps in data might be addressed over the next UNCRC period
- OFMDFM and Departments use the framework and the data populated for it to identify priorities for action in children and young people's policy development and review. The data can be used to highlight key areas where rights are not being fulfilled or where groups of children are doing less well than others

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**Appendix 1: Cluster Analysis Example – Education, Leisure and Culture**

- Existing Indicators are mostly outcome indicators; focus one aspect i.e. attainment; lack children’s view and experience and participation; negative measurements.
- Gaps in Children and Young People’s strategic indicators such as access to funded pre-school place; curriculum changes; pupil exclusion from school; reported access to, and uptake of, play and leisure facilities; children’s enjoyment and reported experience of school; children’s complaints in relation to school, relationships with peers and teachers; School leavers as well as limited disaggregation.
- Some of these gaps can be filled from existing administrative or survey data.

