

From Rights on Paper to Safe Childhoods: Using Data to Strengthen Accountability for Child Protection

Executive summary

Despite near-universal global commitment to children's rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), those rights continue to be routinely violated through violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. One major obstacle to progress is the absence of integrated data and accountability systems that would let governments measure whether their policies and investments are actually improving children's lives.

The current system of global accountability – including CRC monitoring and reporting processes – is fragmented, inconsistent, and driven by compliance rather than impact, offering little practical value for policymaking or child protection system strengthening. Without reliable indicators, governments struggle to identify capacity gaps, prioritize resources, track

progress, and assess the effectiveness of their efforts. GlobalChild indicator sets, built on internationally recognized Structure–Process–Outcome indicators, offer the world's first comprehensive child rights monitoring system, enabling governments to link laws, policies, implementation, and child-level outcomes within a single framework.

Early lessons from the Canadian pilot demonstrate indicators' potential to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination, improve accountability, and support evidence-based decision-making. By transforming governments' CRC reports from a reporting obligation into a strategic self-assessment exercise, GlobalChild can help governments move from commitments on paper to measurable improvements in children's development and well-being.

The questions we sought to answer

- ✓ How can CRC-based indicators strengthen child protection systems beyond reporting requirements?
- ✓ What does it take for governments to operationalize integrated, rights-based data across sectors?
- ✓ How can data be used to improve accountability and inform better policy and investment decisions for children?



A public health approach to child protection

This policy brief addresses the following ISPCAN public health and system-strengthening pillars:

- Advancing data-driven and evidence-based solutions
- Ensuring effective governance and multi-sectoral coordination

The problem: commitment without measurable accountability

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. Yet millions of children worldwide continue to experience violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other violations of their rights. Ratification alone does not guarantee protection.

Governments have committed to protecting children, but too often lack the data and accountability systems needed to know whether children are safer.

The current CRC monitoring process relies heavily on periodic reports that are frequently delayed, incomplete, or based on inconsistent information. Data submitted by governments, civil society organizations, human rights institutions, and children themselves often use different methods and indicators, making it difficult to assess progress, compare results, or identify emerging risks to children.

The consequences extend far beyond reporting. Without reliable and standardized indicators:

- Risks to children remain hidden.
- Resources may be misdirected or inefficiently allocated.

- Reporting becomes burdensome and less useful for decision-making.
- Prevention and protection efforts cannot be effectively evaluated.
- Accountability for results is weakened.
- Children continue to experience preventable violence, abuse, and neglect.

A fundamental weakness of the current system is that it often measures activities rather than impact.

Governments may know what laws, policies, and programs exist, but have limited ability to determine whether they are being implemented effectively or whether they are improving children's lives. Yet children experience outcomes—not policies.

To strengthen child protection systems, governments need reliable evidence that links policies and resources to measurable outcomes for children. Without such information, it is difficult to identify gaps, prioritize investments, monitor progress, and ensure accountability for protecting children from violence and neglect.

The GlobalChild solution

GlobalChild indicator sets offer the world's first comprehensive child rights monitoring system designed to operationalize all substantive rights under the CRC. The system is built on the **Structure–Process–Outcome** model recommended by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and comprises three sets of indicators:

- **Structure indicators:** laws, policies, and institutional frameworks
- **Process indicators:** implementation mechanisms, coordination, and budgets
- **Outcome indicators:** measurable changes in children's lives

Structure- and process-related indicators help verify whether states, as the primary duty bearers, are fulfilling their obligations under the CRC. Outcome indicators address the critical question of whether children, as rights holders, are actually experiencing the realization of those rights and benefiting from the structures and processes established by the state.

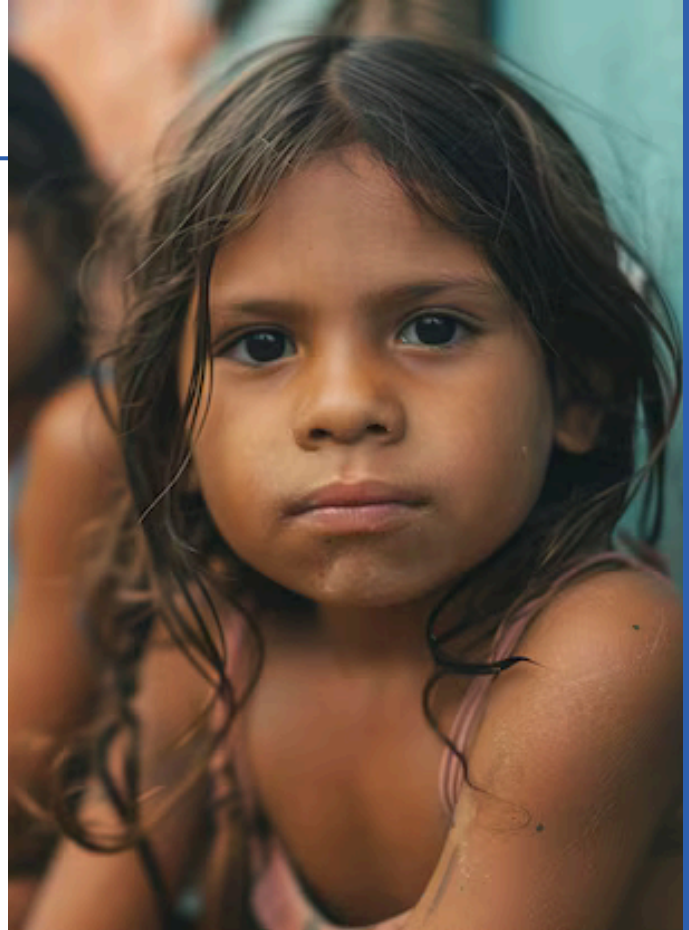
By bringing these three data sets together and examining them vis-à-vis one another, GlobalChild indicator sets enable governments to:

- Assess child protection system performance holistically
- Identify gaps and priorities across sectors
- Strengthen coordination within and across ministries
- Improve the quality, consistency, and usefulness of CRC reporting
- Build a longitudinal national data repository to track progress over time

In doing so, **GlobalChild can transform CRC reporting from a compliance-driven exercise into a strategic governance and accountability tool** that supports evidence-informed decision-making, continuous system improvement, and better outcomes for children.

Policy recommendations

1. Adopt integrated, rights-based monitoring systems to track policies, implementation, and outcomes.
2. Use data to inform policy and investment, inform strategies, budgeting, and performance monitoring.
3. Strengthen multi-sectoral coordination using shared indicators to align efforts across sectors.
4. Invest in capacity building: Provide training for data systems and evidence-based policymaking.
5. Embed monitoring into governance systems: Position CRC monitoring as a continuous decision-making tool and not a periodic reporting exercise.



Implementation considerations

Establishing an integrated child rights monitoring system requires clear leadership and governance arrangements from the outset. The first step is designating a lead ministry or department to coordinate the process and work collaboratively through inter-ministerial structures.

Once this focal ministry is designated, the relevant GlobalChild indicator sets can be distributed to the ministries and agencies responsible for their implementation. For example, indicators under Articles 28 and 29 (the Right to Education and the Aims of Education) would go to the Ministry of Education, while those under Articles 23 and 24 (the Rights of Children with Disabilities and the Right to Health) would go to the Ministry of Health. Each ministry would then be responsible for completing its indicators, providing supporting documentation, and submitting the required data.

The focal ministry would coordinate an iterative process of review and consultation with participating ministries and agencies, ensuring the indicator sets are completed as comprehensively

and accurately as possible. This information can then be compiled into a single, integrated assessment offering a comprehensive picture of children's rights and child protection within the jurisdiction.

GlobalChild indicators can be integrated into existing administrative and information systems, supported by investment in the technical capacity needed for data collection, analysis, and reporting. A phased approach – beginning with pilot jurisdictions and gradually scaling up – can support learning, adaptation, and sustainable uptake.

Meaningful participation from children, civil society organizations, Indigenous communities, and other key stakeholders should be built in where appropriate. Challenges such as fragmented data systems, limited technical expertise, and weak cross-sector collaboration can be addressed through strong leadership, shared accountability mechanisms, sustained investment in data infrastructure, and ongoing capacity building.

Pilot study: New Brunswick, Canada

The first GlobalChild pilot was conducted in New Brunswick, Canada, with the Ministry of Education acting as the focal ministry. The pilot demonstrated the feasibility and value of implementing a comprehensive child rights monitoring system at the government level.

Early lessons

Implementing GlobalChild for collecting data on children's rights required collaboration across multiple sectors that normally collect data separately, including: Health; Education; Social Development; Justice and Public Safety; Labour; the Child Advocate Office; the Health Council of NB; and Data and Research Partners of New Brunswick.

Early lessons from the pilot indicate that GlobalChild can support child protection system strengthening by:

- Strengthening coordination across ministries and sectors
- Providing a clearer picture of system strengths, gaps, and priorities
- Increasing government ownership of CRC monitoring and reporting processes

Strengths and gaps

The pilot revealed both strengths and gaps in the capacity of the Government of New Brunswick for implementation and monitoring of children's rights.

Strengths

- Strong structures, such as the New Brunswick Inclusive Education Policy
- Effective processes, such as the New Brunswick Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
- Impressive outcomes, such as reducing youth incarceration within less than a decade

Gaps

- No policy tool to facilitate child participation
- Gaps in data collection for impact monitoring
- Fragmentation of data across ministries
- Lack of disaggregated data

Recommendations made

1. Build a comprehensive child-rights data collection and monitoring system
2. Why? Better data leads to better decisions, stronger accountability, and more effective services.
3. Develop a policy tool to promote child participation
4. Why? Children's rights are strengthened when they are heard and actively influence decisions that affect them.
5. Strengthen accountability through annual reports on children (to children and the public)
6. Why? Sustainable ongoing progress occurs when processes are transparent.

Broader significance

The pilot demonstrated the potential of a common indicator framework to improve collaboration, support evidence-informed decision-making, and strengthen accountability for children's rights and protection outcomes.



Conclusion

The gap between commitments to children's rights and measurable outcomes remains a critical global challenge. Without integrated, data-driven systems, governments cannot effectively assess performance, prioritize action, or ensure accountability to children.

GlobalChild provides a practical and scalable solution to this challenge. Aligning policies, implementation, and outcomes within a single framework, it enables governments to move from rights on paper to real, measurable change in children's lives.

Now is the time to invest in data-driven system strengthening that enables governments to measure what matters, improve accountability, and ensure that every child's right to protection is realized in practice.



References and further information

- GlobalChild Network: www.globalchildnetwork.com
- OHCHR [Human Rights Indicator Framework](#)
- [New Brunswick Pilot of GlobalChild](#)

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This policy brief accompanies the Rise Up Policy Forum session [From Rights on Paper to Change in Practice: Using GlobalChild Indicators for System-Strengthening and Data-Driven Child Protection](#) that took place in Melbourne in 2026.



The [ISPCAN Rise Up Policy Forum](#) is a global initiative to catalyse progress in child protection through a public health and system strengthening approach. It brings together governments, researchers and practitioners in a community of practice and learning, to build on and translate into action the pledges made during the 2024 Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children.



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