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## Children's Institute (UCT) press statement: Ahead of the 2024 Budget Speech, the United Nations urges South Africa to protect children from budget cuts

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) is urging the South African government to ensure that children's rights are not impacted by rising living costs or cuts to government budgets.

The Committee included these [recommendations in its concluding observations](#) issued on 8 February 2024, following its [meeting in Geneva](#) with the South African government delegation to discuss progress in improving the lives of children in South Africa.

The Committee, a body of 18 independent experts, monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, by the countries that have agreed to be bound by the Convention. All those countries (including South Africa) must submit regular reports to the Committee on the progress they have made in realising children's rights and any challenges preventing progress. Civil society is invited to make submissions to the Committee, before the Committee meets with the government delegation to discuss the state report. The Children's Institute (University of Cape Town) drew the Committee's attention to several urgent challenges, including the need for the government to budget in a way that prioritises the development and wellbeing of children.

In its recommendations, the Committee states that South Africa should: "Allocate adequate budgetary resources, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention, for the implementation of children's rights, in particular the social sectors, and to ensure that the sectors relevant for children's rights are not affected by inflation, budget cuts or adverse economic conditions".

### Government is currently not doing enough to prioritise children

The Children's Institute has previously warned that recent budget decisions by government have a negative impact on children. These include:

- Annual inflation increases to the Child Support Grant (CSG) that are too small to prevent the value of the CSG from shrinking compared to rising food prices. The value of the CSG is now too low to cover the cost of a child's basic nutritional needs, which was the original purpose of the grant when it was introduced in 1998.
- Cuts to the health budget that are resulting in the freezing of posts for health workers, and compromising children's access to health care services.
- Non-profit organisations (NPOs) that provide child protection services are facing closure because provincial departments of social development are cutting NPO subsidies or withdrawing them completely. Provinces claim they have little choice as their budgets are being cut, on top of which they must find money to pay for wage increases for public servants thanks to a deal agreed by national government.
- No inflation increases for the past five years to the per child subsidies paid by the provincial departments of basic education to NPOs providing early learning programmes for children.

### Urgent recommendations from the United Nations

The UN Committee emphasises that the government should take urgent measures to improve the realisation of children's rights in particular areas. The topics and recommendations include the following:

- **The principle of the best interests of the child** should be appropriately integrated in **all** decisions that impact on children, **including decisions on resource allocation that are made by the economic sector.**

- **To address child hunger**, the government should **allocate adequate resources** to the **social assistance programme and health services**.
- **Discrimination** against children who don't have **identity documents** must be addressed. To remove barriers to the registration of child births, the Committee recommends several crucial steps, that include increasing the number and reach of the mobile registration units for children born in rural areas.
- **Health and health services**. The Committee says that the government should provide sufficient human, technical and financial resources to expand access, coverage and quality of universal health care for children across the country. This includes a strong focus on closing the gaps in immunisation, nutrition, HIV, mental health, and adolescent sexual and reproductive services.
- **Child protection**. The government should address the unequal allocation of resources between rural and urban areas, and the "underfunding" of protection programmes, the Committee says. The Committee calls on South Africa to allocate enough resources for programmes and initiatives aimed at protecting children from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect, and to invest in programmes to make the ban on corporal punishment a reality.
- **Education, including early childhood development (ECD)**. The Committee says, among other things, that the government should allocate enough financial resources for the growth of ECD within the public sector.

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More than ever, the government must invest in making it possible for children to develop and thrive. Only then can the cycle of poverty and inequality which continues from generation to generation be broken.

We urge Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana, when he delivers Budget Speech 2024, to honour the recommendations of the Committee and government's commitments to fulfil the international and Constitutional rights of children.

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**Note:** The Children's Institute is encouraged by the many recommendations that the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has made, across a broad range of topics that cannot all be mentioned in this press statement. We therefore encourage children's right advocates – from parents to practitioners – to familiarise themselves with the [full concluding observations document issued by the Committee](#).

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