



Children's Institute, University of Cape Town

Advancing children's rights through research, advocacy and education.

We are an applied research unit proactively engaged in addressing the challenges facing children in South Africa through interdisciplinary and child-centred research, advocacy and education. We combine the rigour of academic enquiry and the energy of civil society activism to explore the tensions between policy, practice and children's lived realities; and to promote the design and implementation of laws and services that enable all children to thrive.



Monitoring the
advancement of
children's rights



Reducing
poverty and
inequality



Protecting
children from
violence



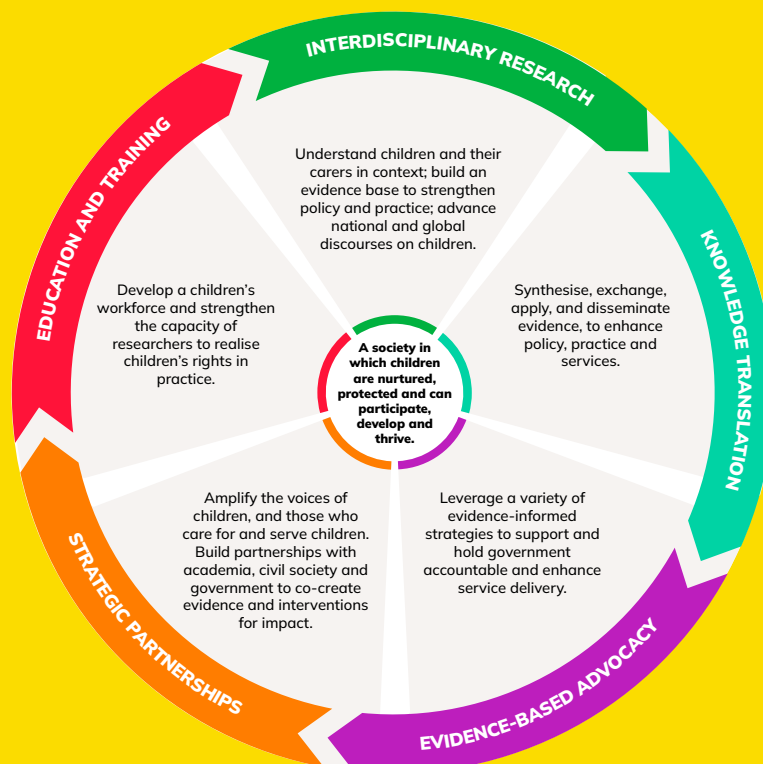
Enhancing
health and
development



Promoting
children's voice
and agency



Securing
futures for
children



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Our thematic areas



Monitoring the advancement of children's rights

The Children's Institute monitors South Africa's progress in realising children's rights and generates evidence to centre children's rights in planning and reform processes. Through this work we hold the state accountable to its constitutional obligations.

Each edition of our annual flagship publication, the *South African Child Gauge*, focuses on a specific theme, providing in-depth analysis of a key challenge facing children and drawing together the best evidence to inform policy and programmatic solutions. It includes a review of the latest law and policy reform affecting children, and a selection of child-centred indicators from our *Children Count* project.

Children Count was established to satisfy the need for regular and reliable statistics on the status of children. Using the best possible sources of information, including large national household surveys and administrative data, *Children Count* monitors progress for children through child-centred indicators linked to rights frameworks and policy goals. Trends in child demography and household arrangements, poverty and social protection, education, health, nutrition and living conditions are unpacked to reveal shifts in spatial, racial, gender and income inequality. The indicators are published annually on the interactive *Children Count* website and in the *South African Child Gauge*. They are used for shadow reports to human rights treaty bodies, are frequently cited in government's strategy and planning documents, and are widely used in advocacy, research and teaching.

The *South African Early Childhood Review* is a statistical review of the status of young children and is developed collaboratively with civil society organisations working on early childhood development and with key government partners. The review tracks progress in the delivery of an essential package of services and related outcomes for children under six years and uses these

indicators to draw attention to possibilities for improved integration of services and data strengthening.

Over many years, we have contributed to building a cadre of researchers and practitioners equipped to support the realisation of children's rights, through teaching and supervision, and short courses for continuing professional development of practitioners in the public health and allied sectors. We play a leading role in developing civil society shadow reports to international and regional human rights treaty supervisory committees and hold the state accountable to recommendations issued by the committees.



Reducing poverty and inequality

Since our inception in 2001, the Children's Institute has contributed to building the evidence base on child poverty dynamics and the role of social assistance, with a strong focus on the Child Support Grant (CSG) – the state's primary programme aimed at reducing child poverty. We have an established reputation as a child-centred think tank on poverty and inequality, and are regularly approached by government, development partners and civil society for expert analysis and technical support in social assistance policy development. Our current work is focused on advocating for the CSG to be restored to the Food Poverty Line, and understanding and addressing systemic barriers to accessing social assistance; in particular ensuring early birth registration for infants, accessible late registration services for unregistered children, and access to social grants while awaiting late birth registration.



Protecting children from violence

Violence against children in South Africa is pervasive: it occurs across the life course and drives both an increased risk for victimisation and perpetration in adulthood. Violence not only causes physical harm but also psychosocial scars that are often hidden – with debilitating, long-lasting and intergenerational consequences. The intergenerational cycle of violence is driven by the intersections of violence against women (VAW) and against children (VAC): they co-occur in the same households, share the same risk factors and are driven by the same social norms. We are leveraging our

evidence on the intersections of violence to improve the integration of planning, policies and services for women and children. We are also monitoring the impact of budget cuts on child protection services and working to strengthen policies aimed at enforcing the ban on corporal punishment in schools.



Enhancing health and development

Working across multiple sectors, we aim to understand children's lived realities, the contexts within which they live, and social change that affects their health and development. Our current work includes interventions to promote the transformation of health care services beyond a narrow focus on treatment and child survival, to creating an enabling environment in which children can thrive and realise their rights to physical and mental health and wellbeing. This shift from a survive agenda to a thrive agenda has profound implications for the design and delivery of maternal and child health care services.

Our work is currently focussed on piloting and evaluating a group care approach to delivering pre-natal services, promoting continuity of care between pre- and post-natal services, optimising the Road to Health Book as a tool to promote child development; investigating violence prevention interventions for young children through the health system; and researching community systems and structures that facilitate or impede quality early learning.

We address the commercial determinants of health by holding the infant formula industry accountable for violations of the law and advocating for improved restrictions on the marketing of infant formula and foods that are harmful to child health. We are also building an evidence base to revive law reform aimed at reducing the harmful effects of alcohol.



Promoting children's voice and agency

Children and young people in South Africa have a broad array of political rights but these are not always respected in practice. While it is becoming more common for children to be invited into formal policy consultations, often these processes are tokenistic. Academic literature on activism and social movements pays little attention to the contribution of children themselves to social and environmental justice. A few studies are beginning to provide insights into how children and young people are redefining what citizenship means by engaging in activism

in Europe, Latin America, and Asia – but children's activism in Africa is under researched.

The Children's Institute has always supported children's participation in law reform and in research. One of our key focal areas now includes developing approaches to strengthen child activist campaigns by applying evidence that is co-produced with child activists, and supporting children and youth to participate in law and policy reform that affects them. We are also capacitating adults to work collaboratively with children through a short course on the ethics of research with children.



Securing futures for children

Children are growing up in a time of polycrisis and we need to be ready to respond to emerging challenges.

- Climate change threatens human health and safety, food and water security, social and economic development. The risks increase as adverse weather events become more frequent. The impacts on children and their needs must be considered in the development of mitigation strategies.
- Rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are outstripping society's capacity to make informed decisions about their implications. The general release of Open AI, Microsoft Copilot and Google AI has sparked debates about how such technologies will impact future employment, education, and ethics. These changes present both threats and opportunities that need to be explored from the perspective of children.
- Just as the environment in which children are raised is changing, so too is our population. South Africa is in a process of demographic change and transition. Persistent patterns of mobility alongside rapid urbanisation present further challenges and opportunities for considering spatial development plans, continuity of services and forward-planning for the built environment and social infrastructure to ensure policies and programmes that accommodate children and their families.

To ensure our research agenda remains relevant and responsive to emerging challenges facing children and families, we are creating a hub to share innovations in theory, ethical practice, and research methods. We want to equip policymakers, practitioners, civil society, children, and young people with knowledge and tools to maximise opportunities to address challenges for children and young people's futures in a changing world.

Our impacts in research, advocacy and education

	Secured a Court order protecting children from being denied birth registration or IDs when their parents IDs have been blocked by Home Affairs.	 Expert affidavit guided Constitutional Court case that declared corporal punishment in the home unconstitutional.	Our technical support to government resulted in the CSG Top-Up being introduced in 2022, effectively bringing the value of the CSG to the food poverty line for orphans living with relatives.
Previous four <i>Child Gauge</i> issues generated 300+ headlines, R19 million in media coverage, 26 000 website views and 350 citations.	 <i>Children Count</i> interactive online resources for data on children in SA - 40 indicators, 6 domains. www.childrencount.uct.ac.za	Improved the awareness that children without birth certificates are eligible for social grants, amongst the public, paralegals, social workers, child and youth care workers and SASSA officials.	 16 editions of the SA <i>Child Gauge</i> tracked progress for children, bridging the research-policy divide.
 Campaigned for inclusion of children in the National Strategic Plan on GBV.	Our shadow reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child contributed to the Committee recommending the State should "ensure that the sectors relevant for children's rights are not affected by inflation, budget cuts, or adverse economic conditions".	 Built ECD community partnership to strengthen safety, inclusion and participation through our ECD research.	Improving the health and wellbeing of pregnant women by introducing group antenatal care in the SA public health system.
Technical support to government helped grow monthly Child Support Grant by R30 in 2023 - adding R4.6 billion (\$269 million) to social assistance for children.	 Legal advocacy increased the number of children without birth certificates who benefit from grants, from 30 000 in 2019 to 50 000 in 2023.	Built a research evidence base on the intersections of violence against women and children.	Contributed to a Court order that obliges the SA Council for Educators to revise its mandatory sanctions document for teachers found guilty of assaulting learners, and to promote rehabilitation of teachers prior to classroom return.
Our evidence and legal arguments in the National School Nutrition Programme case contributed to the Court interpreting children's constitutional right to basic nutrition as an immediately realisable right.	 Supported children to be active citizens and change laws.	Developed 250+ child health advocates through child rights education.	