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UNICEF Partnership with Academia to Advance Child Rights

The Child Rights Centers Initiative in Greece

Paper by Ghassan Khalil, *PhD* and Vasilis Fasoulis, *PhD*

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Map of Child Rights Centres



UNICEF Partnership with Academia to advance child rights

The Child Rights Centers initiative in Greece

A. The concept of Child Rights Centers

The Child Rights Centres are knowledge hubs within universities that serve to promote and mainstream child rights in society. The Child Rights Centres initiative builds upon a strongly established institution in modern societies that performs critical social functions beyond learning; among its other roles, university education supports social development by fostering social values, principles and norms that promote democracy, human rights and active citizenship.[1] As such, universities constitute the ideal vehicle to promote the child rights agenda across society. On the other hand, universities can also benefit from the establishment of Child Rights Centres to serve as a point of reference for children's rights. This is reciprocally advantageous both for the universities and for the advancement of child rights. Moreover, Child Rights Centres have been designed, established and supported based on a built-in capacity approach. In other words, UNICEF makes sure to expand the interest in children's rights and supports interested professors of universities to become experts in child rights so a solid ground at universities is created.

The Child Rights Centres initiative as an operational concept of a meaningful partnership between UNICEF and Academia was introduced and launched in 2020 in Georgia by the UNICEF Representative at that time, Dr. Ghassan Khalil. It was very well received by Akaki Tsereteli State University in the city of Kutaisi, followed by other six State universities and later by three private universities.[2] The successful evolution of the Child Rights Centres concept in Georgia between 2020 and 2023 quickly demonstrated its utility by validating the theoretical assumptions upon which the selection of universities to take on this task was based and led the way to replicating this model in Greece[3] where Dr. Ghassan Khalil assumed his duties as UNICEF Representative, while potentially this partnership can be replicated in other countries as well.

i. The contribution of the Child Rights Centres in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The multilevel contribution of the Child Rights Centres due to their critical functions can effectively support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Given that the functions of the Child Rights Centres adequately support some key "general measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child",[4] as set out in General Comment 5 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Child Rights Centres themselves can serve as an overarching enabler for making the Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality for every child. Specifically, the Child Rights Centres certain critical administrative and other measures (non-legislative measures) required for the effective implementation of the Convention, such as: monitoring child rights implementation; generating evidence and data; training and capacity building; enhancing cooperation with civil society and international cooperation; and making the Convention known to adults and children. This renders the Child Rights Centres a strategic initiative for implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the Convention is a legally binding treaty to the countries that ratified it, every country around the globe can benefit from the operation of such Centres. An additional comparative advantage of the Child Rights Centres to support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that the Centre concept is easily transferable and adaptable to any country context; it is also cost-efficient, as it enables a significant systemic transformation in the long term at a low financial cost, which ensures its sustainability.

> *"Children's rights are an integral part of human rights. They are not special rights, but Special Human Rights. The development of international human rights law has caused the positive development of the traditional concept that considered 'Rights' as legal enforcement procedures only, to turn it into a concept that consecrates 'Rights', and specifically 'Child Rights', as an effective tool for the improvement of the situation of children all over the world."*
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> ***- Ghassan Khalil , Child Rights: The historical evolution, Chemaly & Chemaly, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002, p. 111 & 147.***

1. Laker, Jason, Concepción Naval and Kornelija Mrnjaus (eds.), *Citizenship, Democracy and Higher Education in Europe, Canada and the USA,* Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014.
2. Kirtskhalia, Eteri, "Mission Report, Supporting the establishment of Child Rights Centers in Greece", January 2024.
3. To support the Child Rights Centres initiative in Greece, an internal Taskforce was established in September 2023. The membership of the taskforce includes the following UNICEF staff (in alphabetic order): Marina Drymalitou, Vasilis Fasoulis, Ghassan Khalil, Kleopatra Laina, Elena Marda, Giorgos Simopoulos.
4. Khalil, Ghassan, *Child Rights: The historical evolution,* Chemaly & Chemaly, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002, p. 120.

ii. The regional focus of Child Rights Centres

The operational approach of the Child Rights Centres follows the principle that human rights are realized at local level.[5] For this reason, in terms of governance and given the independence of local governance, investing in and engaging with municipal and regional authorities, as well as with other local actors, is a key prerequisite for effectively and holistically upholding child rights in every corner of a given country. As such, Child Rights Centres have a strong reference to the local level to ensure that all children, regardless of the area in which they reside, have their rights taken seriously into consideration by the local context. The Child Rights Centres are envisaged to operate as drivers for integrating child rights at local level through partnerships with local actors, institutions and structures.



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Hellenic Mediterranean University

"Child rights are realized at local level: in every school, in every neighbourhood, in every community, in every cultural sport and leisure club. Thus, it's important to strengthen the culture of child rights at this level through investing in and cooperating with governments, institutions, and actors at local level. For this reason, the Child Rights Centres started in Georgia with a strong regional approach, and in Greece the plan envisages establishing Child Rights Centres covering all 13 administrative regions of Greece."

- Ghassan Khalil, UNICEF Representative in Greece


UNICEF/GREECE/ATHANATOS/2023

University of Patras

5. Collins, Tara, "The general measures of implementation: opportunities for progress with children's rights", *The International Journal of Human Rights,* vol. 23, no. 3, 2019, pp. 338-356.
6. Guidance Note of the UN Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming. Call to Action for Human Rights, July 2023.
7. Ilbid, p. 9, bullet point 1.
8. Ibid, p. 8, bullet point 6.
9. James, Allison, and Alan Prout, eds, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood,* 2nd ed., Routledge/ Falmer, London, 1997, p. 8.


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University of Peloponnese

iii. The contribution of Child Rights Centres to the implementation of the UN Secretary-General Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming

The Child Rights Centres initiative also serves as the right platform to demonstrate the commitment of the UN system to strengthening the mainstreaming of child rights within their country programming, as expressed in the Guidance Note of the UN Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming (2023).[6] More specifically, the Child Rights Centres will contribute to "the capacity building of and technical assistance to governments and civil society on child rights… to identify and tackle the challenges that hinder the full recognition of children as rights holders".[7] Within this framework, the Child Rights Centres adopt a holistic child rights-based approach as guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees that children are recognized as active subjects with a full spectrum of rights including civil and political rights.


UNICEF/GREECE/GRIPIOTIS/2025

University of Peloponnese

In addition, the Child Rights Centres realize the guidance of the UN Secretary-General on linking child rights to the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[8] Investing in child rights is a requirement for a sustainable future given that children who are agents of change need to have their rights and capacities realized so that they can actively partner for the realization of the SDGs. In addition, as relevant theory has demonstrated,[9] children constitute a variable of social analysis, thus child-related issues need to be mainstreamed across all SDGs. Based on these two principles, the convening power of UNICEF, in line with SDG 17 on partnerships to achieve the SDGs, has the capacity to establish strong partnerships, such as those with Academia regarding Child Rights Centres, that can place children and their rights at the heart of sustainable development and thus contribute to it.

Furthermore, the Child Rights Centres are best positioned to act as a catalyst for mainstreaming child rights across other UN agencies. Established under the auspices of UNICEF, which under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 45) is designated to support its implementation, Child Rights Centres have the potential to provide the theoretical and conceptual background and the necessary actionable guidance to UN agencies for effectively strengthening and elevating the child rights agenda in their working methods and activities.

B. The added value of Child Rights Centres in Greece

Greece has made considerable progress in advancing the rights of children in recent years. However, their full realization, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child Greece has signed and ratified, is yet to be achieved. Targeted policies and consistent financial commitments that specifically meet the needs of children need to be further strengthened. In addition, there is a narrow vision of how child rights are relevant to all aspects of social life. In specific cases, social perceptions of child rights lag behind compared to other social or political values, while children are usually seen as passive objects of protection, rather than active subjects of rights, or as dependent, incompetent, and lacking autonomy and agency, denying them their capacity to make decisions for themselves and actively participate in social life. Challenging these perceptions requires a scientifically driven approach which Child Rights Centres can mainstream across society and its formal and informal institutions. This, in turn, can positively impact children's well-being and development. Concerted efforts and stronger synergies with partners who can place child rights at the centre of their work are essential. In that sense, Child Rights Centres constitute a critical investment where the long-term outcome is a stronger culture able to uphold child rights in society. As such, they are best placed to ensure that child rights are considered both conceptually and in practice.

i. The role of Child Rights Centres within Greek universities

When it comes to Greek universities, despite advances over the last decade, the integration of child rights across university curricula needs to be further strengthened. Child rights only appear as a distinct course (not as a core requirement but as an elective course) in the curricula of very few faculties of pedagogy, or they are partly addressed in the context of other disciplines (usually public, international or constitutional law in the faculties of law). However, even in these cases, child rights are only seen in strictly disciplinary terms, leading to a fragmented approach that limits students' understanding of their more modern conception. In the wake of recent developments, child rights have emerged as an autonomous scientific discipline resulting in the need for a more cohesive and interdisciplinary approach that ensures a comprehensive understanding of child rights beyond the boundaries of a specific discipline. This will increase the impact that universities can have in promoting knowledge and awareness of child rights. Similarly, high-quality thematic research on child rights issues, even though present, is not always conceptualized through the lens of a child rights-based approach. Additionally, it is not organized under a cohesive framework and structure within universities that can effectively consolidate and disseminate the relevant knowledge generated. This means the knowledge is not visible and accessible to government agencies and policymakers to inform their decision-making and positively impact the realization of child rights in Greece. Its academic and broader social mainstreaming also remains limited. In addition, the role of university institutions in promoting child rights across society can be further strengthened by adopting a more coordinated and extroverted approach, addressing actors and institutions in their context beyond the field of education. The contribution of Child Rights Centres is expected to gradually address these shortcomings in the long term by establishing and institutionalizing an academic culture that considers child rights as an autonomous subject that is based on an interdisciplinary scientific approach and will lead to the development of an stand-alone syllabus within the university curricula.



UNICEF/GREECE/NEBOTAKIS/2025

International Hellenic University

ii. The establishment of Child Rights Centres in Greece

For the first time in Greece, UNICEF is establishing Child Rights Centres in collaboration with universities aiming to cover all 13 administrative regions of Greece. The initiative acquires an institutional format within universities, as the Centres are established for both symbolic and operational reasons at a high level within the university structure under the authority of the rector. In addition, following a meeting between UNICEF Representative in Greece Dr. Ghassan Khalil and the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports Mr.Kyriakos Pierrakakis in September 2023, the Child Rights Centres initiative secured the political recognition and support of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports.

iii. Building capacity in child rights within universities

The first Child Rights Centre was established at the University of Patras in October 2023.

Currently, seventeen (17) universities and a research centre (National Centre For Scientific Research Demokritos) have established Child Rights Centres, as follows:

- University of Patras, October 2023
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, November 2023
- Democritus University of Thrace, February 2024
- University of Crete, May 2024
- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, May 2024
- University of Thessaly, December 2024
- International Hellenic University, December 2024
- Hellenic Mediterranean University, January 2025
- University of Ioannina, February 2025
- University of Western Macedonia, March 2025
- University of Peloponnese, March 2025
- Hellenic Open University (February 2026)
- Panteion University (March 2026)
- University of Macedonia (April 2026)
- University of the Aegean (April 2026)
- University of West Attica (June 2026)
- Ionian University (June 2026)

"The Child Rights Centres constitute a valuable opportunity for universities to strengthen their openness and extroversion to society and to spread knowledge beyond the walls of the campus."

- Ghassan Khalil, UNICEF Representative in Greece

To create a solid ground for the operation of the Child Rights Centres once a Child Rights Centre is established at every university, UNICEF is providing a two-day consultation workshop, with professors and scientific staff to introduce and discuss the concept of Child Rights Centres and their pivotal role and function in promoting child rights.

The consultation workshops also aim at providing an overall orientation to the fundamental principles and historical evolution of child rights, the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its four guiding principles, as well as the complementarity of the Convention with other related international human rights instruments and the incorporation of child rights into university curricula[10]. All universities having established Child Rights Centres in Greece have received the two day conslultation on child rights.

The consultation workshops were facilitated by the UNICEF Representative in Greece and Dr Eteri Kirtskhalia, the Coordinator of the Child Rights Centres at UNICEF Georgia. The consultation workshops will be followed by a four-month professional learning programme to allow interested university profes-sors and lecturers to acquire and strengthen in-depth knowledge on child rights and become 'Child Rights Professors'.



University of Thessaly

10. Kirtskhalia, Eteri, "Mission Report, Supporting the establishment of Child Rights Centres in Greece", January 2024.



Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

UNICEF/GREECE/AVRAMIDIS/2023

C. The Child Rights Centers functions to advance child rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the guiding framework for the operation and objectives of the Child Rights Centres, which are realized through three main functions:

a. Promotion of child rights;
b. Generation of evidence-based knowledge on children; and
c. Teaching and integrating child rights into the university curricula.

i. Promotion of child rights

The objectives

Universities are uniquely positioned to disseminate knowledge about child rights beyond their student bodies and help establish a stronger culture for upholding child rights through their links to different sectors of society. In their local context, Child Rights Centres have the potential to act as platforms for fostering partnerships and engaging with child rights actors outside the university, as such as central and local government and authorities, schools, local communities, civil society organizations, the private sector and professional groups to actively promote, advocate for and raise awareness of child rights. Activities to promote and build awareness of child rights include developing training modules and delivering trainings, workshops, seminars and conferences, capacity-building activities for professionals working with and for children,[11] public campaigns and lectures, as well as developing and disseminating relevant educational and informational resources. Child Rights Centres aim at integrating the practical application of child rights into the social life by mainstreaming child rights across disciplines and social actors in different sectors.

The expected outcomes

The outcome of this function is that Child Rights Centres are transformed into active hubs and reference points at local level for promoting, advocating for, and raising awareness of child rights, thus generating a multiplier effect that leads to a stronger child rights culture and greater awareness in society. The role of Child Rights Centres as local hubs will increase the interaction of universities within their local context that will mutually enable universities and local actors to strengthen their synergies, identify common objectives and develop innovative solutions to advance the realization of child rights based on local needs. The operation of Child Rights Centres within this framework is expected to increase the social import of child rights by increasing individual and institutional awareness and accountabilities to respect, uphold and protect the rights of all children. It is noteworthy that while each Child Rights Centre will be serving the respective administrative region, all the Centres will be closely connected through 1) delivering within the same vision and approaches and mainly within the three key functions and expected outcomes, and 2) through networking and exchanging knowledge, experiences, successes and challenges.

ii. Generation of evidence-based knowledge on children

The objectives

Utilizing the research capacity of the universities, Child Rights Centres will be positioned to generate new knowledge and evidence on the situation of children through a child rights-based approach to the relevant research. UNICEF's research capacity, and guiding principles and standards[12] will promote the application

11. Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 5: General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child", CRC/GC/2003/5, 27 November 2003.
12. United Nations Children's Fund, "UNICEF Policy on Research", CF/EXD/2016-003, UNICEF, 2016.

of a child rights-based approach to the research that enhances its quality, ensures adherence to ethical standards,[13] promotes accessibility, communication and dissemination of research outputs, while encouraging partnerships for research. This approach ensures that research activities respect child rights, including the right to express their views, and benefit the most disadvantaged children by revealing inequities.[14] First of all, the establishment of a child rights-based approach to the research will result in more accurate and rights-oriented research outputs that identify and prioritize child rights issues and better guide actionable and operational response measures. In addition, Child Rights Centres will provide a structure within universities to consolidate and disseminate child-specific research knowledge so that it is made visible and accessible to the benefit of children. The Centres would also have an advisory role on child rights to the operation of universities and their research projects.



University of Thessaly

The expected outcomes

In that capacity, the expected outcome is that Child Rights Centres will become hubs for knowledge and evidence on children's rights and create a virtuous circle of dissemination and learning on child rights that Parliament, central and local government agencies, and other decision-makers can access to inform their decisions and develop policies that better serve the interests and the rights of children. The generation of qualitative knowledge and evidence on children will inform policymaking and contribute to better planning, designing and implementing child-sensitive and evidence-based interventions, policies, legislation, and decisions related to children at national and local level that respond to their real needs and guarantee the full realization of the rights for all children. Furthermore, the dissemination and communication of research outcomes beyond the academic community will provide the required evidence for targeted advocacy efforts that support the realization of child rights.



Hellenic Mediterranean University

13. United Nations Children's Fund, "UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis", PROCEDURE/OOR/2021/001, UNICEF, 2021.
14. Simopoulos, Giorgos & Magos, Konstantinos, "Approaching the education of young refugees. Teachers' perceptions and students' voices". In: A. Chatzidaki and R. Tsokalidiou (Eds) Challenges and Initiatives in Refugee Education: The Case of Greece. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021.

iii. Teaching and integrating child rights into university curricula

The objectives

Child Rights Centres promote the teaching and integration of child rights as an integral part of the university curricula. Equipping academic personnel with the expertise to integrate child rights into their teaching is the foundation for fostering scientific knowledge among university graduates which ensures that pre-training on child rights is included in core university specialties. Building a high level of awareness about child rights among future professionals through their university education can have a multiplier effect on the social impact of child rights in the long term. The integration of child rights into academic teaching and curricula across different disciplines requires high-quality orientation for university teaching staff. As a response, UNICEF will provide a two-day consultation workshop at each university to establish a Child Rights Centre and will be followed by an in-depth professional development learning programme for university professors and lecturers on how to integrate the child rights dimension into their teaching methods, pedagogical practices, course content and research. They, in turn, will be able to pass on their child rights knowledge to their students and influence their perceptions and awareness of the value of child rights.

The expected outcomes

The main outcome of investing in teaching and in the integration of child rights into university curricula is that university graduates will have the required knowledge and sensitization regarding child rights to better position them to respect, uphold and protect child rights, both as individuals and as future professionals. In the medium term, this approach may also foster a more participatory learning environment for students, one that actively strengthens inclusion and fights discrimination. This function of the Child Rights Centres is directly linked and contributes to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provision that education shall be directed to "... the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...".[15]



University of Thessaly



Democritus University of Thrace

15. Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 29, par. 1.



Democritus University of Thrace

This function also supports the implementation of the provision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a milestone document in the history of human rights, that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms".[16] Both documents lay out the foundations of Human Rights and Child Rights Education, which are also supported by Child Rights Centres.[17] The objective of Child Rights Centres to bolster the teaching of child rights responds to a fundamental requirement for a functional Child Rights Education system – investment in the capacities of schoolteachers. This is expected to specifically benefit pedagogical departments (of pre-school, primary, and secondary education) at universities whose mission is to enrich future teachers with the awareness and skills on child rights required for the effective implementation of Child Rights Education.



University of Patras

Integrating child rights into the university curricula: The case of a Master's programme on Child Rights

While the integration of child rights as a standalone course at the undergraduate level is essential for establishing foundational knowledge on child rights, it does not suffice for fostering in-depth, multidimensional expertise in the discipine. Such specialization can only be effectively achieved through a dedicated postgraduate programme. Over the past two decades, the recognition of child rights as an autonomous academic discipline has led to a growing trend across Europe in the establishment of Master's programmes focused on this area. [18]

16. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 26, par. 2.
17. Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 1: The aims of education", CRC/GC/2001/1, 17 April 2001, para. 15.
18. Kirtskhalia, Eteri, "Discussion Paper on establishing a Joint Master's Program in Child Rights", May 2025.

Within the framework of the Child Rights Centres initiative—particularly its third pillar which emphasizes teaching and integrating child rights into university curricula—a Master's programme offers significant added value. It serves as a nexus that interconnects the initiative's three core pillars: promotion, research, and teaching child rights. These programmes can function as dynamic laboratories where students actively engage with all three dimensions, gaining practical experience through a diverse range of activities facilitated by the Child Rights Centres.

In light of these considerations, the development of a Joint Master's Programme in Child Rights is collaboratively designed by the University of Patras and the University of the Peloponnese, with technical support from UNICEF. This programme aims to advance knowledge, inform policy, and enhance practice in the field of child rights, and is open to both national and international students.

The Child Rights Centres at both universities will serve as laboratories for research and experiential learning, offering Master's students direct engagement with real-world child rights issues. This embedded, hands-on approach provides a distinct comparative advantage by closely integrating academic study with practical application. Through this initiative, the participating institutions aspire to establish themselves as leaders in child rights education in Greece and to contribute meaningfully to the global advancement of child rights.



UNICEF/GREECE/GRIPIOTIS/2025

University of Ioannina



Letter of intent to a Master's Programme on Child Rights signed by University of Patras and University of the Peloponesse


UNICEF/GREECE/TSAKALIDIS/2025

University of Western Macedonia

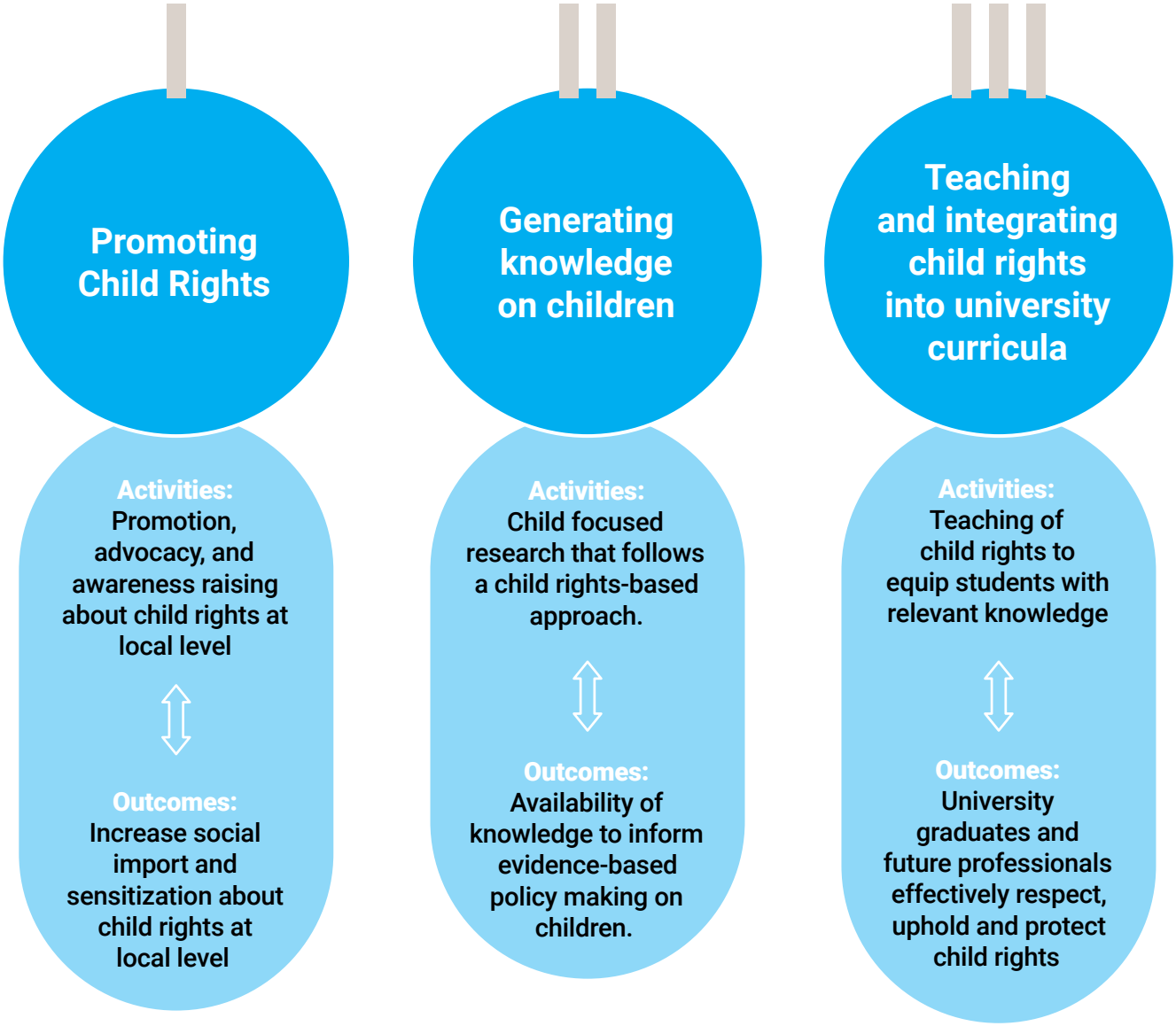
Child Rights Centres in a nutshell

The Child Rights Centres are knowledge hubs within universities that serve to promote and mainstream child rights in society.

The Child Rights Centres are an enabler for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in every country.

Child Rights Centres

Innovative Partnership with Academia to advance Child Rights



D. 1st International Conference on the Role of Academia in promoting child rights

The first Interational Conference on the "Role of Academia in promoting child rights" was co-organized by UNICEF and the University of Patras on June 6 and 7 2025, at the University's Conference and Cultural Center. The conference was attended by 144 speakers from 17 countries, representing 37 universities and 12 research institutes and policy-making bodies.

The conference sessions included, among other things, the promotion of child rights in society, the inclusion of child rights in university courses with references to successful practices in various countries, access to education for all children, the role of universities in combating bullying and promoting healthy habits, strengthening quality inclusive education, active citizenship, the legal dimension of child rights and the development of Child Rights Centers in universities.

During the opening ceremony of the Conference awards were presented by the UNICEF Representative in Greece, Dr. Ghassan Khalil, to the Rector of the University of Patras, Professor Christos Bouras and the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Akaki Tsereteli State University in Georgia, Professor Mamuli Buchukhishvili, as the two universities were the first in their respective countries to establish Child Rights Centers in collaboration with UNICEF, as well as to Professor Thanasis Karalis for establishing and coordinating the first Child Rights Centre in a Greek university. The ceremony was also attended by H.E. the Ambassador of Georgia to Greece, Mr. Levan Beridze, while the Alternate Minister of Health of Greece, Dr. Eirini Agapidaki and Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Dr. Sophie Kiladze made welcome remarks via video message.

In his speech, Dr. Khalil emphasized that there are currently Child Rights Centres operating in eleven Greek universities, with more expected to be established soon.

"We are more than proud to promote and advocate for child rights through the establishment of Child Rights Centres within Greek Universities, as they are already proving to serve as both hubs for knowledge and as vital links between Academia and society, in a pivotal moment for children's rights around the world"

- Dr. Ghassan Khalil, UNICEF Representative in Greece



UNICEF GREECE/MICHALATOS/2025

1st International Conference on the Role of Academia in Promoting Child Rights, University of Patras, June 2025

"I believe that the creation of a Child Rights Centre is at the core of the mission of Greek public universities. Co-organizing the Conference with UNICEF to highlight research and good practices regarding the contribution of the academic community to the promotion of the children's rights agenda is further proof that the University of Patras is outward-looking and open to society and its needs"

- Professor Christos Bouras,
Rector of the University of Patras



1st International Conference on the Role of Academia in Promoting Child Rights, University of Patras, June 2025

The conference featured key note speeches by Dr. Roberta Ruggiero, Director of the Children's Rights Academy at the University of Geneva and academic coordinator of CREAN (Children's Rights European Academic Network), Theoni Koufonikolakou, Greek Deputy Ombudswoman for children's rights, and Professor Joao Costa, former Minister of Education of Portugal and currently Head of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Also participating were Dr. Joao Breda, Head of the WHO Office on Quality of Care and Patient Safety in Greece.

The Conference also hosted a panel dedicated to the role of businesses as active agents of society in respecting and promoting children's rights. The panel included Alexandra Palli, President of CSR Hellas, Sofia Stamou, Director of Communications & Corporate Affairs at Olympia Odos, and Venia Rapti, Director of Communications and Digital Marketing at Coffee Island.

The discussion highlighted the need for further partnerships with the private sector, where companies can support very important initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting children's rights.

The conference was complemented by the delegates' visit to two parallel events that were taking place during the Conference. The first was the 16th Children's Festival of the Department of Early Childhood Education of the University of Patras, which has been promoted as a good practice by the UNICEF Greece Country Office and which was visited by more than 100 participants before the opening ceremony of the Conference. The second event was the "Food for Action" Health Festival, which was part of the National Action Against Childhood Obesity, implemented by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with UNICEF and coordinated in the Region of Western Greece by the scientific team of the University of Patras, headed by Professor Emeritus of Hygiene at the Department of Medicine, Michalis Leotsinidis.

During the closing ceremony of the Conference, a Letter of Intent was signed between the Rectors of the University of Patras and the University of Peloponnese (Professor Bouras and Professor Katsis) and UNICEF Representative in Greece, Dr. Khalil, for the creation of a foreign-language Master's program on child rights, which will be developed in partnership with UNICEF and the Child Rights Centers of the two universities.

Photos from the Conference are available here

Video Highlights from the International Conference available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3y9XBLCtYk

The proceedings of the Conference are available at: https://youtube.com/live/8c4sEYgaCf0?feature=share (first day) and https://youtube.com/live/yyuDafgzQb8?feature=share (second day)

E. Network meeting of the Child Rights Centres Coordinators

The first in person Network Meeting of Child Rights Centres coordinators from around Greece was orgnaized at the University of Patras in April 2025. The initiative inaugurates a dynamic platform of exchange among the Child Rights Centres across Greece to enhance their operations and activities, foster collaboration, and promote the sharing of best practices and innovative approaches in the field of child rights.

The first Network Meeting was attended by Coordinators of 11 Centres that have been established throughout Greece in collaboration with the University of Patras, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the Democritus University of Thrace, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the University of Crete, the University of Thessaly, the International Hellenic University, the Hellenic Mediterranean University, the University of Ioannina, the University of Peloponnese and the University of Western Macedonia.

Participants were welcomed by the Rector of the University of Patras Professor Christos Bouras and the UNICEF Representative in Greece Dr. Ghassan Khalil. In their opening remarks both leaders expressed their deep appreciation for ongoing collaboration between UNICEF and academic institutions in Greece. They underscored the critical role that the Universities – and particularly Child Rights Centers – play in promoting and embedding a strong child rights culture across the country.

Rector of the University of Patras Professor Christos Bouras stated that:
"The collaboration between UNICEF and Academia is a critical initiative to advance child rights in Greece and University of Patras has demonstrated its commitment by establishing the first Child Rights Centre in Greece".

Dr. Ghassan Khalil stated that:
"The Child Rights Centres constitute a valuable opportunity for universities to strengthen their openness and extroversion to society and to spread knowledge beyond the walls of the campus."

Coordinators of the 11 Child Rights Centers across Greece reaffirmed their collective commitment to deepening the partnership with UNICEF and academic institutions. They highlighted the critical role of promotion of child rights, research and teaching child rights for advancing the rights and well-being of every child. The discussions were enriched by insights from the experience of Child Rights Centers established in Georgia between 2020 and 2022. This exchange offered valuable perspectives on the impact such centers can have, sparking dynamic dialogue around future activities and the potential to expand partnerships—including with the private sector—to further strengthen child rights initiatives in Greece.



Network meeting of the Child Rights Centres, Patras, April 2025, Nadine Perrault, UNICEF Representative in Cameroon

F. The Child Rights Centres' pivotal role in achieving the 'whole-of-society approach'

The Child Rights Centres model builds upon the "whole-of-society approach in promoting and protecting child rights". This approach is founded on the assumption that society includes a mixture of social structures, institutions, individuals, groups and communities that need to be equally mobilized to effectively uphold child rights. Based on this, every segment of society, such as the central and local government and authorities, Parliament, independent authorities, civil society organizations, international organizations, schools, academia, faith-based organizations, professional groups, the judiciary, media, the diplomatic community, the private sector, and, most importantly, children and young people themselves, is expected to take on their specific role in upholding children's rights. Establishing an ownership culture of child rights by the entire society ensures a sustainable awareness of child rights that can lead to the change of social norms to the benefit of children.[19] Ultimately, this approach is dictated by art. 42 of the Convention, whereby "states should make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known", while the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment 5 indicates that a "comprehensive strategy for disseminating knowledge of the Convention throughout society"[120] needs to be in place. Child Rights Centres can effectively respond to this legally binding obligation imposed by international human rights law on every country.

The reason that UNICEF strategically selected to partner with Greek academia is twofold. On the one hand, universities themselves constitute a critical component of the 'whole-of-society approach' while they also perform multilevel functions, such as education and training, research and knowledge generation, that affect the establishment of a child rights culture in society. As universities are among the key agents of socialization of individuals and help to shape their perceptions, Academia's contribution can have a multiplier effect on the social value and footprint of child rights. On the other hand, universities act as key catalysts for driving the child rights agenda across other segments of society at both central and local level. This can be achieved through partnerships for mainstreaming, promoting and raising awareness of child rights with various actors and stakeholders, in the spirit of the SDGs in general and SDG 17 in particular.

G. The role of the Child Rights Centres in strengthening a child rights-based practice in social work and in promoting child-friendly social services at community level

Social workers are the first line of response for children in need or at risk – this positions them among the fundamental agents for protecting and promoting their rights. A well-functioning child protection system requires the application of relevant knowledge and practice by social workers. Embedding children's rights in social work serves precisely this purpose. Besides, training and capacity building on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and child rights is a legally binding commitment for States imposed by art.



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19. Khalil, Ghassan, *Child Rights: The Historical Evolution,* Chemaly & Chemaly, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002, p. 117.
20. Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 5: General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child", CRC/GC/2003/5, 27 November 2003.

42 of the CRC and its interpretation by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child[21] which specifically names social workers amongst the key professionals that States are called to invest in. Integrating child rights in the social work practices, values, and principles upgrades the social work theory and practice and contributes to a holistic realization of child rights. In Greece, this is ever more essential considering that there are no institutionalized specialized training programmes on child rights for social workers.

As the idea that children are autonomous rights holders evolved over the years, "social work shifted emphasis from expansion of services to extension of children's rights".[22] At the same time, social work strongly influenced the children's rights movement and contributed towards the adoption of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (1989). Especially after the adoption on the CRC, child rights became a framework of reference and influenced the character of social work.[23] In its modern conception, social work embraces the notion of child rights that moves away from needs-based and charity-based approaches which may still be socially present. However, this shift to a child rights-based approach is not an easy endeavor given that, beyond the social perceptions on the low status of children that are not agents of their own acts, social work by its conception integrates a strong culture of diagnosing what is "needed" in a situation and what are the "corrective" actions required to lead to a specific outcome which is usually defined on supposedly "objective" criteria.[24]

The value of child rights-based practice in social work

Here it comes the added value of a child rights-based approach in social work that brings multiple advantages when applied. Firstly, it links social work with a normative framework that is grounded in international human rights law and its flagship treaty, the CRC and its guiding principles. The desired outcome is clear: the realization of child rights. This does not leave room to serve in the name of children other, irrelevant priorities or pursuits. For example, when social workers are called to decide, their actions need to be informed by the best interest of the child principle within the range of provisions outlined in the CRC which guarantees child rights-based outcomes. Similarly, based on art. 12 of the CRC, children should be treated as autonomous rights holders who can express their views about the social work decisions affecting them. In other words, every single action of the social work practice should be based and informed by the framework of child rights as set out in the CRC.

Secondly, strengthening a child rights-based approach in social work provides the framework for grounding social work actions on specific legal commitments and criteria while it also ensures an institutional process for children and their caregivers to claim their rights that is tied to the principles of the rule of law. As such, for example, the implementation of the best interest of the child principle of the CRC is guided by the relevant legislative and operational framework, while children can claim their rights through formal mechanisms such as the judicial system or quasi-judicial proceedings.



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21. Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 5: General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child", CRC/GC/2003/5, 27 November 2003, chapter H.
22. Marvin Silverman, "Children's Rights and Social Work", *Social Service Review*, vol. 51, No. 1, The 50th Anniversary Issue, Mar., 1977, pp. 171-178.
23. Rudi Roose and Maria De Bie, "Children's rights: a challenge for social work", *International Social Work*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2008, pp. 37-46.
24. Hanita Kosher, Asher Ben-Arieh, Yael Hendelsman, *Children's Rights and Social Work*, Springer Cham, 2017, p. vii-viii.



Workshop on Social Work and Child Rights in Heraklion, Crete

In addition, provided that, contrary to needs, rights imply duties[25] and duties require accountability, a child rights-based approach provides another transformative shift that makes the social work system and consequently the principal duty bearers, the States, accountable for their actions. Considering that these actions have an impact on children, accountability ensures that child rights are better protected in the context of a commitment framework which imposes to States responsibility, transparency, prevention, enforcement, and redress in relation to child rights.

A child rights-based approach to social work brings benefits to social workers and contributes to their professional development. Knowledge and understanding of the CRC can provide them with common principles and framework to apply in their work which ensures alignment in their approaches based on child rights standards. In addition, considering that child rights as set out in the CRC are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, social workers can provide a holistic assessment of a case based on the full spectrum of child rights. Moreover, with improved knowledge on child rights, social workers will have greater capacity to inform children about their rights and empower them towards demanding their rights as well as expressing their views on their implementation and violation. They will also acquire the skills to recognize and identify rights violations apart from their traditional forms and to work systematically towards their prevention. A child rights-based approach can transform social workers into agents of change by not just addressing the effects of a situation but also its root causes through the lens of child rights. Last but not least, knowledge about child rights can position social workers to become better advocates for child rights and contribute to a systemic change that focuses on strengthening the culture of child rights across the social protection system.

The partnership of the Child Rights Centers with the Association of Social Workers, and UNICEF to strengthen a child rights-based practice in social work

Capitalizing on its convening power, UNICEF will promote a partnership of the Child Rights Centers and the Departments of Social Work of the respective universities with the central and local Associations of Social Workers to strengthen a child rights-based practice in social work. This tripartite partnership - whose strength derives from the core mandates of each one partner - can leverage transformative results for children. Tailored consultation workshops for social workers working for and with children will be carried out by the Child Rights Centers (Departments of Social Work) and UNICEF at local level to ensure that they acquire the theoretical and applied knowledge on child rights to drive their day-to-day functions. The Child Rights Centers, through the Departments of Social Work, will provide the theoretical and applied knowledge required for the social work students; the Associations of Social Workers will practically engage social workers and highlight their learning needs; UNICEF - through its normative role - will translate the provisions and principles of the CRC into actionable practices based on international standards and best practices. The result of this important initiative is expected to have a direct and effective contribution to the realization of child rights. The ultimate systemic transformative end result of this partnership is the development of an in-service professional training programme for social workers on a child rights-based practice in social work as well as the integration of the child rights perspective into the university curricula in the Departments of Social Work.

25. Neil MacCormick, *Legal Rights and Social Democracy: Essays in Legal and Political Philosophy*, 1982, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 154-156.

Enhancing social services for children at municipal level

Linking the partnership among Child Rights Centers (Departments of Social Work), the central and local Associations of Social Workers, and the municipalities, provides a unique opportunity for promoting child-friendly social services at community level. This initiative is based on a knowledge-sharing and networking model and builds upon the penetration of the Child Rights Centers in their local context. In cooperation with the central and local Associations of Social Workers, the Child Rights Centers are expected to provide capacity building activities and expert advice based on the latest scientific trends to municipal social services staff to strengthen their awareness on child rights and support the establishment of inclusive, child-friendly and child-rights based social services and practices. In addition, through this partnership combined efforts to enhance policy advocacy can have a stronger impact on legislative changes and resource allocation by influencing child welfare policies at local, regional, and national levels.



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H. Child Rights Centres and the Private Sector

Business and the private sector are intrinsic to the social and economic fabric of our world. Thus, over the last decades there has been an increasing recognition of the role of businesses in safeguarding human rights, including child rights.[26] UNICEF has been engaging with the private sector for over 50 years to raise awareness about the unintentionally negative impacts of business activity to children worldwide. Inspired by this framework and the global work of UNICEF on child rights and businesses,[27] an integral part of the Child Rights Centres activities is focusing on the promotion and protection of child rights in the business sector. This is based on the reality that children interact with businesses in various ways—as consumers, family members of business employees, and even as future or current employees—and that businesses activities impact children both directly and indirectly through the business practices towards parents and caregivers.


Panteion University

26. Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights", CRC/C/GC/16, 17 April 2013;
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework", OHCHR, New York and Geneva, 2011.

27. UNICEF, UN Global Compact, and Save the Children. *Children's Rights and Business Principles.* 2012;
Mawson, Andrew, Humberto Cantú Rivera, and Subajini Jayasekaran.
Charting the Course: Embedding Children's Rights in Responsible Business Conduct.
United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Global Compact, and Save the Children, October 2022.



Hellenic Open University


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University of Ioannina

Businesses can play a critical role in safeguarding child rights by positively contributing to and minimizing negative effects on children. Reassessing policies, processes and commitments in relation to child rights is a growing requirement for businesses today. Mainstreaming children's rights into core business strategies and operations ensures a responsible approach to child rights while also strengthening sustainable practices which is a key pathway to building a systemic and lasting private sector contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The engagement of businesses with child rights can form part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, which guide companies in incorporating ethical, social, and environmental considerations into their business practices.


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National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

For instance, some of the actions that businesses can take are the following: incorporating child rights in their policy commitment[28] and in due diligence processes;[29] developing a child protection code of conduct for business operations including investing in its awareness and ongoing training; reinforcing safety and injury prevention of children by their products or services; inprorporating family-friendly policies in the workplace; ensuring protection of children in the digital space as well as in the context of the environment; considering the views of children in the design and implementation of responsible business strategies, policies and practices; combating illicit child labor; prioritising responsible marketing and advertising with respect towards children's rights, promote positive self-esteem, healthy lifestyles and non-violent values, adhere to the "do no harm" rule.

Child Rights Centres are adequately equipped to generate the necessary evidence and guide the private sector through briefings, trainings and publications on embedding children's rights in responsible business practices. This includes generating the necessary evidence through impact assessments on child rights across relevant internal functions and processes. The development of a tailored framework for the promotion and protection of children's rights in the business sector, particularly in the context of Greece and Greece and other countries across the globe, could be a highly impactful outcome of this initiative.



Inauguration ceremony of the Child Rights Centre at the university of Dschang, Cameroon

28. Policy Commitment is a statement that sets out the business's responsibility to respect rights, including children's rights, as described in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. A policy commitment should be approved at the most senior level of the business and be informed by relevant expertise. It should stipulate the business's expectations of personnel, business partners and others directly linked to its operations, products or services. It should be publicly available, communicated internally and externally, and embedded in relevant policies and procedures. It may also include a statement of the business's commitment to support rights. (Source: UNICEF, UN Global Compact, and Save the Children. *Children's Rights and Business Principles.* 2012)
29. Human rights due diligence is business's ongoing processes for assessing its actual and potential human rights impact, including on children's rights, integrating and acting upon its findings, tracking its responses and communicating how its impact is addressed, as set out in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights endorsed by the United Nations Human Rights Council. Human rights due diligence should cover adverse impact that the business may cause or contribute to through its own activities, or which may be directly linked to its operations, products or services by a business relationship. (Source: UNICEF, UN Global Compact, and Save the Children. *Children's Rights and Business Principles.* 2012).

I. Child Rights Cetres beyond Greece

Building on the comparative advantage of the Child Rights Centres and their easily transferable, adaptable concept to any country context, universities in several other countries have also established Child Rights Centres. This expansion demonstrates the model's effectiveness and flexibility, enabling university institutions worldwide to support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Below there is a list of universities having establsihed Child Rights Centres by country (in alphabetic order).

Albania
• LOGOS University College (March 2025)

Cameroon
• University of Yaounde 2 (December 2024)
• University of Dschang (January 2025)
• University of Yaounde 1 (February 2025)
• University of Bertoua (May 2025)
• University of Central Africa (May 2025)
• Univetsity of Bertoua (February 2026)
• University of Ngaundere (February 2026)
• Evangelical University of Cameroon (Banjoun) (March 2026)
• University of Buea (April 2026)

The international conferecne on The Role of Academia in Promoting Child Rights held in Cameroon

UNICEF Cameroon and the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC), in collaboration with the national network of Child Rights Centres in Cameroon, convened an International Conference on 19–20 November 2025 in Yaoundé, Cameroon on The Role of Academia in Promoting Child Rights.



University of the Aegean

Georgia
• Akaki Tsereteli State University (Kutaisi) (February 2021)
• Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (March 2021)
• Sokhumi State University (July 2021)
• Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University (July 2021)
• Samtskhe-Javakheti State University (Akhaltsikhe) (August 2021)
• Shota Meskhia State Teaching University of Zugdidi (March 2022)
• Gori State Teaching University (May 2022)
• Grigol Robakidze University (private) (February 2023)
• Caucasus University (Private) (March 2023)
• East European University (Private) (April 2023)
• Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University (July 2024)

Serbia
• University of Kragujevac (November 2025)

The Gambia
• University of The Gambia (June 2025)


University of Macedonia



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Consultation on child rights with Professors at the University of Yaoundé I, Cameroon

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Contact Details:
UNICEF Greece Country Office
Lochagou Spiliotopoulou 8
157 73, Zografou
Athens, Greece
Office: +30 211 2340 297
Email: greece@unicef.org
www.unicef.org/greece