

Child rights budgeting

Video transcript

I'm Juliet Harris, Director of Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights).

I'm here to talk to you about the steps you can take to implement child rights budgeting in your work or organisation.

Before we start, it might be useful to reflect on some of the terms I'll use throughout this presentation.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (known as the UN Committee).

This is an independent expert body that monitors how well countries fulfil their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UNCRC).

Concluding Observations.

These are the recommendations issued by the UN Committee after reviewing a country's implementation of the UNCRC. They highlight both successes and areas that need to be improved.

General Comments.

Published by the UN Committee, General Comments provide in-depth explanations of specific rights or themes within the UNCRC, almost like an 'instruction manual' on how to take forward a children's human rights approach in different areas.

Maximum available resources.

The most resources a government can reasonably mobilise and use to fulfil children's economic, social, and cultural rights.

Minimum core.

The basic level of rights that must be secured for every child, regardless of a country's economic circumstances.

You will hear me use these terms throughout this presentation.

Child rights budgeting means taking children's rights into account when making decisions about spending money or allocating resources. The aim of child rights budgeting is to enable the realisation of rights for all children. It exists alongside several other mutually reinforcing budget frameworks such as gender budgeting and participatory budgeting.

Professor Aoife Nolan, a leading expert in children's rights, says "Budgets are a key sign of a government's values. So, if human rights are not in there, what's being said is that they're a value not worth counting."

Professor Nolan's quote helps us understand the importance of child rights budgeting. That taking forward child rights budgeting is a crucial reflection of our values and how we turn our commitment to children and young people's rights into tangible improvements in their lives.

Child rights budgeting is not only about considering children's rights when making decisions, but also embedding human rights standards into the process through which these decisions are reached. These principles include participation, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability. This means children, young people and their families should be included in identifying the changes needed to secure their rights and decision makers should target resources towards these issues as far as possible.

Children and young people who work with Together's membership have told us to:

"Put more money into supporting low income families."

"Put funding towards support for disabled people."

"The government doesn't have the money to get it wrong, so should invest in listening to children and young people to get it right."

Children and young people clearly understand the need for targeted investment that addresses the specific needs of children and young people whose rights are at risk, taking an approach to budgeting that means no one is left behind.

To help us understand how to integrate child rights budgeting into our work, it's worth looking at the UN Committee's General Comment 19.

Published in 2016, General Comment 19 offers comprehensive guidance on how public budgets should be structured to further children's rights. It sets out the need to use maximum available resources to realise children's rights and highlights the importance of budgetary processes that are participatory and transparent, ensuring that all decisions are made with children's best interests as a primary consideration.

I know that General Comments can feel intimidating if you are new to children's rights.

Excitingly, General Comment 19 was the very first General Comment to be published with an accompanying child-friendly version, developed in partnership with children and young people. This version simplifies the legal language to help children and young people understand how budgetary decisions affect them and how they can be involved in advocating for budgets that uphold their rights. It also provides a great introduction to adults who are new to child rights budgeting who want a quick overview of the principles and processes involved.

So what more do we need to do in Scotland to take forward child rights budgeting?

In 2023, the UN Committee made nearly 200 recommendations to the UK, including Scotland, on what more needs to be done to further children's rights. These recommendations were strongly influenced by children and young people in Scotland, and we call them "Scotland's to do list for children's rights". In relation to child rights budgeting, the UN Committee recommended improvements in tracking, monitoring, and equitable allocation of resources, ensuring transparency and the active participation of children and young people.

The Scottish Government recently published a response to the UN Concluding Observations, including the recommendations on child rights budgeting. The Scottish Government also has new responsibilities in the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 to publish a Children's Rights Scheme, which must include setting out arrangements for Scottish Ministers to "consider the rights of children in the Scottish Government's budget process." With the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and the need to turn our commitment to children and young people's rights into tangible improvements in their lives. There are steps we can all be taking to harness the power of child rights budgeting. Drawing from General Comment 19, these steps could include:

- Establishing tracking and reporting systems to make sure we know how much we're spending on infants, children and young people, and making sure those children and young people whose rights are at risk are identified and sufficient resources allocated to address their needs.
- Creating budget lines specifically aimed at improving the lives of infants, children and young people whose rights are at risk, including making sure that they are shielded from the impacts of any budget cuts when difficult decisions are being made.

- Involving infants, children and young people in budget decision-making processes, especially in decisions that directly affect their rights.

Together Top Tips

Our Together members created some Top Tips on child rights budgeting that we included in our State of Children's Rights report 2022. These include:

- Making a clear commitment to ensuring adequate human and financial resources are allocated to implement children's rights.
- Working with infants, children and young people to assess necessary actions and direct budgets to target these issues.
- Prioritising children's rights through commissioning and grants. Incorporate a children's human rights approach in all processes.
- Empowering children's participation in budget processes by providing information and training, in appropriate language and formats.
- Gathering disaggregated data to identify specific issues and groups whose rights are most at risk.
- Reviewing the impact of budgetary decisions regularly, including with children and young people.

To end it's worth spending some time reflecting on these Top Tips, and actively considering how we can embed child rights budgeting in our work.

I'll finish with some reflective questions that I encourage each of you to contemplate. Thank you.

- When could you use child rights budgeting in your work?
- How would you consider infants, children and young people whose rights are at risk when making budget decisions?
- What could you put in place to ensure you hear from children when you make budget decisions?
- What could you put in place to ensure budget decisions that affect children are evaluated afterwards to check their impact?

This resource was developed as part of the Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework project funded by Scottish Government.

Also available in this series:

Rights at risk

Child Rights Impact Assessments

Visit the Together website for more information

www.togetherscotland.org.uk

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), charity number SC029403