

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2014 IN NUMBERS

EVERY CHILD COUNTS

Revealing disparities,
advancing children's rights

unite for
children

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Introduction

Thirty years have passed since *The State of the World's Children* began to publish tables of standardized global and national statistics aimed at providing a detailed picture of children's circumstances.

Much has changed in the decades since the first indicators of child well-being were presented. But the basic idea has not: Credible data about children's situations are critical to the improvement of their lives – and indispensable to realizing the rights of every child.

Data continue to support advocacy and action on behalf of the world's 2.2 billion children, providing governments with facts on which to base decisions and actions to improve children's lives. And new ways of collecting and using data will help target investments and interventions to reach the most vulnerable children.

Data do not, of themselves, change the world. They make change possible – by identifying needs, supporting advocacy, and gauging progress. What matters most is that decision-makers use the data to make positive change, and that the data are available for children and communities to use in holding duty-bearers to account.

◀ Erlan, 3, has his height and weight recorded in the Konlikul District, Uzbekistan.
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▲ Girls queue up at school in Cambodia. © UNICEF/CBDA2010-00264

Lives behind the numbers

Consider the tables that follow this essay: the rows and columns of numbers, the array of fine print. Here, reduced to stark symbols, are the present and future of nations: children. As your eyes move from column to column, some of the many facets of their lives unfold. The numbers tell stories about the circumstances in which children are born and cared for, grow and learn, work and connect with others, and make their way in the world.

Pick a country, any country. What proportion of births is registered, and how many children are thus granted an official identity and the rights that flow from it – rights to services, protection, the exercise of citizenship?

How many children die within a year of being born, and how many never live to see their fifth birthday? How long can those who do survive expect to live? Are they receiving essential vaccines and medicines to protect them against the diseases that prey on the young

and vulnerable? Are they getting the nourishment they need for their bodies and minds to thrive? Do they have clean water for drinking and washing, and access to safe, hygienic toilets?

What percentage of children enter primary school, and how many make it to secondary school? How many are put to work or married while still children? Do they enter adolescence equipped with the knowledge to protect themselves against HIV?

The data show that tremendous progress has been made during the past few decades:

- About 90 million children who would have died if mortality rates had stuck at their 1990 level have, instead, lived past the age of 5.¹
- Deaths from measles among children under 5 years of age fell from 482,000 in 2000 to 86,000 in 2012, thanks in large part to immunization coverage, which increased from 16 per cent in 1980 to 84 per cent in 2012.²

- Improvements in nutrition have led to a 37 per cent drop in stunting since 1990.³
- Primary school enrolment has increased, even in the least developed countries: Whereas in 1990 only 53 per cent of children in those countries gained school admission, by 2011 the rate had improved to 81 per cent.⁴
- Nearly 1.9 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation since 1990.⁵

But the tables also bear witness to ongoing violations of children's rights:

- Some 6.6 million children under 5 years of age died in 2012, mostly from preventable causes, their fundamental right to survive and develop unrealized.
- Fifteen per cent of the world's children⁶ engage in child labour that compromises their right to protection from economic exploitation and infringes on their right to learn and play.

The world's poorest children are

2.7X

less likely than the richest ones to have a skilled attendant at their birth



- Eleven per cent of girls are married before they turn 15,⁷ jeopardizing their rights to health, education and protection.
- The right to freedom from cruel and degrading punishment is violated whenever children are subjected to

violent discipline at home or in school.

The tables also reveal gaps and inequities, showing that gains and deprivations are unevenly distributed. Children's chances differ depending on whether their country is a rich or a

All rights, every child

In creating the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the international community has recognized that children are people who have rights that must be respected equally to those of adults.

Four main principles form the core of the CRC:

- Non-discrimination or universality (article 2): All children have rights, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
- Best interests (article 3): The child's best interests must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting her or him.



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