

# INTEGRATED POLICY MAKING FOR CHILD WELL-BEING: COMMON APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

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## Child Well-being Policy Papers

This paper takes stock of OECD countries' recent initiatives to strengthen the integration of child well-being policies and lays out the challenges countries face as they work to push the child well-being policy agenda forward. It documents OECD countries' experiences of implementing integrated policy plans for child well-being and child-specific policy tools, specifically child indicator sets, child impact assessments and child budgeting, based on information collected in the 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire. The paper illustrates that pursuing efforts to strengthen policy integration is costly; it is important for countries to proactively consider the arising challenges and to look at options to overcome or avoid altogether the common pitfalls.

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# Abstract

Good policy making for child well-being calls for government ministries and agencies to better collaborate and focus on a small number of key child well-being issues. This paper takes stock of OECD countries' recent initiatives to strengthen the integration of child well-being policies and lays out the challenges countries face as they work to push the child well-being policy agenda forward. It documents the use of integrated policy plans for child well-being and child-specific policy implementation tools across the OECD, based on the information collected in the 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

The analysis finds that integrated policy plans for child well-being are a widespread tool for policy integration and countries generally view them as making a positive contribution to coordinating the child well-being agenda. Integrated plans can provide the needed strategic direction for child well-being, improve policy coherence, and increase the visibility of child well-being issues. Yet, countries face significant implementation challenges that prevent these integrated plans from playing a substantial role in steering the child well-being policy agenda. To improve their effectiveness, countries could use these integrated plans to generate traction on specific cross-cutting issues and to funnel attention to a “small number” of key issues. Being clear and explicit about priority groups is necessary, on top of thinking concretely about service integration. The analysis also shows that countries don't have a long history of routine use of child-specific policy tools, but there's an expressed desire to increase their use and to build the relevant competencies. Countries should look to learn from each other's experiences and recent initiatives. As this paper illustrates, pursuing efforts to strengthen the integration of child well-being policies is costly. Therefore, it is important for countries to proactively consider the challenges that are highlighted and to look at options to effectively overcome or avoid the common pitfalls to maximise the benefits for children.

# Résumé

L'élaboration de bonnes politiques en faveur du bien-être de l'enfant exige que les ministères et les agences gouvernementales améliorent leur collaboration et concentrent leurs efforts sur l'avancement d'un petit nombre de questions clés liées au bien-être de l'enfant. Ce document fait le point sur les initiatives récentes des pays de l'OCDE visant à renforcer l'intégration des politiques de bien-être de l'enfant, et présente les défis auxquels les pays sont confrontés lorsqu'ils s'efforcent de faire avancer l'agenda politique en matière de bien-être des enfants. Il documente l'utilisation de plans d'action intégrés pour le bien-être de l'enfant et d'outils de mise en œuvre de politiques spécifiques à l'enfant dans l'ensemble de l'OCDE, sur la base des informations collectées dans le Questionnaire 2022 de l'OCDE sur les politiques de bien-être de l'enfant.

L'analyse montre que les plans d'action intégrés pour le bien-être des enfants sont un outil largement répandu pour l'intégration des politiques et que les pays les considèrent généralement comme une contribution positive à la coordination de l'agenda du bien-être des enfants. Les plans intégrés peuvent fournir l'orientation stratégique nécessaire pour promouvoir le bien-être des enfants, améliorer la cohérence des politiques et accroître la visibilité de cet agenda. Cependant, les pays sont confrontés à d'importants problèmes de mise en œuvre qui empêchent ces plans intégrés de jouer un rôle substantiel dans l'orientation de l'agenda politique en matière de bien-être de l'enfant. Pour améliorer leur efficacité, les pays pourraient utiliser ces plans intégrés pour traiter des questions transversales à différents ministères et autorités compétentes, et pour concentrer l'attention sur un "petit nombre" de questions clés. Il est nécessaire d'être clair et explicite sur les groupes prioritaires, en plus de penser concrètement à l'intégration des services. L'analyse montre également que les pays n'ont pas une longue expérience de l'utilisation systématique d'outils politiques spécifiques aux enfants, mais qu'ils ont exprimé le souhait d'accroître leur utilisation et de développer les compétences correspondantes. Les pays devraient s'inspirer des expériences et des initiatives récentes des uns et des autres. Comme l'illustre ce document, la poursuite des efforts visant à renforcer l'intégration des politiques de bien-être de l'enfant est coûteuse. Il est donc important que les pays considèrent de manière proactive les défis mis en évidence et examinent les options permettant de surmonter ou d'éviter les écueils courants afin de maximiser les bénéfices de telles initiatives pour les enfants.

# Table of contents

OECD Papers on Well-being and Inequalities	1
Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Résumé	4
Introduction	7
<b>1 Integrated policy plans for child well-being</b>	<b>10</b>
What is an integrated policy plan for child well-being?	10
Age ranges and target groups covered	13
Implementation timeframes	15
Reporting arrangements	16
Design of the integrated policy plans	19
Documentation	19
Setting the overall goal (i.e., the vision)	19
Defining high-level priorities	21
Policy domains focused on	21
Children's involvement	22
Different policy approaches to promoting child well-being	24
Child rights approach	24
Child protection approach	27
Health approach	29
Well-being approach	30
Leadership of the child well-being policy agenda	35
<b>2 Using child-specific tools to inform policy and budgetary decisions</b>	<b>39</b>
Child impact assessments	39
Child data and child well-being indicator sets	41
Child-specific budgeting approaches	47
<b>3 Moving the child well-being policy agenda forward: opportunities and challenges</b>	<b>51</b>
Integrated policy plans are seen as offering opportunities for steering the child well-being policy agenda	51
Growing integrated policy plans into a more effective tool for cross-government work	52
Strengthening mechanisms to foster policy integration	54
Child consultation	56

Accountability/reporting mechanisms	56
Indicator sets	56
Child Impact Assessments	58
Budget/resource allocation	58
<b>References</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Annex A. 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Tables</b>	
Table 1. Reporting arrangements for the integrated plan for child well-being	17
Table 2. Countries and regions taking a child-rights approach to the integrated plan for child well-being	24
Table 3. Countries and regions taking a child protection approach to the integrated plan for child well-being	28
Table 4. Countries and regions taking a well-being approach to the integrated plan for child well-being	30
Table 5. Coordination leads for the integrated plan for child well-being	35
Table 6. Selected national child data initiatives and indicator sets	44
Table 7. Selected data activities linked to monitoring integrated plans for child well-being	45
Table 8. Mechanisms and tools in place to promote policy coordination of integrated policy plans	55
<b>Figures</b>	
Figure 1. Most OECD countries have an integrated policy plan for child well-being	12
Figure 2. Around half of integrated policy plans for child well-being are implemented between two to five years	15
Figure 3. Most integrated plans incorporate child protection policies while fewer address children’s access to learning materials and personal care products	22
Figure 4. Around half of OECD countries have a child well-being indicator set	43
<b>Boxes</b>	
Box 1. Japan’s Six Basic Principles for child and youth policies	11
Box 2. A snapshot of integrated policy plans for child well-being in federal OECD countries	12
Box 3. Focusing on all children or targeting the most vulnerable only? Learnings from Australia’s experience	14
Box 4. Selected visions for the child well-being policy agenda	20
Box 5. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: the four general principles and general measures of implementation	26
Box 6. Child rights versus child well-being approaches: “cousins not twins”	31
Box 7. Wales’s seven core aims for children and young people	32
Box 8. Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included (SHANNARRI): Scotland’s eight child well-being indicators	34
Box 9. Selected coordination mechanisms for the integrated plans	37
Box 10. Approaches to child impact assessments in the OECD	40
Box 11. Cross-national child data: What are the biggest data gaps?	42
Box 12. Finland’s National Child Strategy and child data: the journey so far	45
Box 13. OECD countries’ experiences of developing child-specific budgeting	47

# Introduction

Child well-being policies play a major role in ensuring that every child, regardless of their background and life circumstances, has equal opportunities to develop to their full potential and enjoy success and happiness in life. Good child well-being policies are those that take properly into account what children need and should be able to do to thrive, both in the “here and now” and in the future. They also take aim at preventing or mitigating the consequences of inequalities rooted in children’s family and socio-economic backgrounds and of childhood adversity<sup>1</sup> on later life outcomes, including adult health, education, labour market and social outcomes (OECD, 2009<sup>[1]</sup>; 2019<sup>[2]</sup>; Clarke et al., 2022<sup>[3]</sup>).

Child well-being is multi-dimensional and dynamic. Therefore, good policy making for child well-being brings the issue of policy integration to the fore. This means thinking about multiple aspects of children’s lives and their interconnectedness, and of the cumulative effects of childhood experiences on children’s development and their future life course (Masten et al., 2005<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>).

Good policy making for child well-being also involves understanding and acting on the interdependencies of children’s well-being to that of their parents and caregivers. The well-being of the most disadvantaged or vulnerable children is a key consideration given that these children’s needs are often multiple and more complex and necessitate coordinated actions in different policy areas, and service systems (Riding et al., 2021<sup>[6]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>). Ultimately, good policy making for child well-being calls for government ministries, agencies and other service providers to better collaborate and focus on a small number of key child well-being issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic made all the more apparent the need for governments to better coordinate the child well-being policy agenda and to more systematically take into account the needs and interests of children in the policy cycle. Indeed, responding to the pandemic resulted in many governments taking actions beyond the traditional boundaries of policies and service sectors to ensure children’s well-being (OECD, 2021<sup>[7]</sup>). Moving forward, as the work of government returns to business as usual, the challenge is to institutionalise – over the longer-term – relevant structures and processes to improve integration of child well-being policies and to overcome the key challenges and pitfalls.

This paper accounts for the recent initiatives taken in OECD countries to strengthen the integration of child well-being policies and to develop the institutional tools and mechanisms aimed at facilitating the implementation of integrated policy plans. It explores the different approaches taken across the OECD to develop integrated policy plans for child well-being and discusses some of the common challenges facing the child well-being policy agenda. The paper is informed by responses to the 2022 OECD Child Well-

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<sup>1</sup> Childhood adversity is a broad term that refers to a wide range of circumstances or events that pose a serious threat to a child’s physical or psychological well-being. Common examples of childhood adversity include child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, bullying, serious accidents or injuries, discrimination, extreme poverty, and community violence. Research shows that such experiences can have serious consequences, especially when they occur early in life, are chronic and/or severe, or accumulate over time.



being Policy Questionnaire, which OECD countries responded to in the first half of 2022.<sup>2</sup> Results of the Questionnaire highlight the many efforts underway to strengthen policy integration and the common challenges that arise.

This paper is organised into three sections. Section 1 begins by looking at the existence of integrated policy plans for child well-being across the OECD. It describes these integrated plans' general aims, their implementation timeframes and reporting arrangements, and efforts to involve children in their preparation. It then looks at these integrated plans' design, summarising the approaches to priority setting, and outlining the main policy approaches underpinning these integrated plans, including their respective advantages and challenges. Section 1 concludes by looking at leadership of the cross-government policy agenda on child well-being across the OECD. Section 2 discusses OECD countries' experiences of using different child-specific tools to increase the use of evidence in policy and budgetary processes. Section 3 summarises the biggest challenges to moving the policy agenda on child well-being forward, including strengthening the effectiveness of tools and mechanisms to foster integration of child well-being policies.

The key findings of this paper are:

- OECD countries undertake a lot of different initiatives to strengthen the integration of child well-being policies. Integrated policy plans for child well-being are a widespread tool for policy integration, with countries generally viewing them as making a positive contribution to coordinating the child well-being policy agenda. In total, **more than half of OECD countries** (21 out of 34 that responded to the Questionnaire) **have an integrated policy plan for child well-being**. The scope of these integrated policy plans varies from country to country as do implementation timeframes and the practice of identifying priority groups of children to target.
- OECD countries pursue different policy approaches to the integrated policy plans for child well-being. A **child-rights approach** is the most popular, reflecting the fundamental role that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has as a basis for child well-being policies. A **well-being approach** is the second most popular, highlighting the sometimes alignment of child well-being to broader well-being initiatives and efforts to consider more systematically the potential interactions and trade-offs of intervening in different areas of children's lives
- OECD countries are getting better at consulting with children, however there's still room to be clearer about how children's views actually shape the integrated policy plan's development and implementation. Usually, children are consulted for their views on the integrated policy plan's priorities and content but **just as great of efforts should go into asking them about their needs for services and supports** to learn about the barriers they may face.
- OECD countries typically place **leadership of the child well-being agenda within a single government ministry or agency**, usually those with a social or health portfolio. No obvious differences exist in leaderships arrangements across the different policy approaches of the integrated policy plans. Several countries use **inter-ministerial committees and the centre of**

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<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire was threefold: i) to collect information on approaches taken across the OECD to developing child well-being policies; ii) to generate knowledge on the use of integrated policy plans for child well-being; and iii) to gather information on mechanisms used for mainstreaming children's needs and interests in budgetary and decision-making processes. A draft version of this Questionnaire was presented to the Working Party on Social Policy in late 2021, with comments received from delegates integrated into the final version. The OECD Secretariat administered the Questionnaire to OECD countries through delegates of the Working Party on Social Policy in early 2022. The OECD Secretariat invited federal countries and countries with devolved government to provide a response to the Questionnaire for the central government and for a regional government. The OECD Secretariat issued the Questionnaire to countries through the LimeSurvey platform; however, a small number of countries choose to submit responses directly to the OECD Secretariat. The OECD Secretariat compiled and cleaned the data, and undertook further desk research to ensure consistency of information and to fill in incomplete responses to the extent that was practical.

**government to drive implementation**, with the roles of these mechanisms relevant for prioritisation and brokering of partnerships.

- OECD countries face significant implementation challenges that prevent the integrated policy plans from playing a substantial role in steering the child well-being policy agenda. Though there is evidence to indicate that the integrated policy plans help to steer policy, there are **concrete difficulties in growing them beyond a guiding framework to become a real driver of cross-government work**. The integrated plans can provide the needed strategic direction to promote child well-being and increase the visibility of child well-being issues, but they don't necessarily succeed in coordinating the whole policy agenda and preventing duplication.
- **To become more effective, the integrated plans need to be able to generate traction on specific cross-cutting issues and to funnel attention to a 'small number' of key issues**. It is critical that these 'small number' of key issues capture the very issues that are putting children's well-being most at risk, be that specific problems affecting children or tricky implementation issues. Furthermore, coordination processes should be streamlined as much as possible to minimise the coordination burden that integrated plans may generate.
- Overall, OECD countries don't have a long history of routine use of certain child-specific policy tools to increase the use of evidence, specifically child impact assessments (CIAs), child well-being indicator sets and child-specific budgeting. For instance, around **half of OECD countries have a child well-being indicator set but fewer again have an indicator set linked to monitoring their integrated policy plan's progress**. Nevertheless, countries have an expressed desire to increase the use of these tools and to develop the relevant competencies and methodologies.
- **Countries need to be strategic in their investments and application of child-specific policy tools**. For example, extending the use of CIAs, requires countries to look at when and where they might be a priority as conducting CIAs to assess the impact of each and every policy would be extremely costly. Developing the child data infrastructure, especially for policy monitoring, requires sustained investment, strong coordination of the production of information on children and making better use of untapped information collected by service providers. The latter includes strengthening data linking to produce information on cross-cutting issues and ensuring that data reflect territorial heterogeneity. Aligning budget allocation processes with cross-cutting child well-being policies and targets is critical, and would require exploring integrating child well-being priorities into existing budgetary processes.
- It's still early days when it comes to determining which approaches to integrating child well-being policy making stand out as the most effective. Many countries are as of yet still in the initial stages of implementing their first integrated policy plan. Some of the countries that are further along and have done good reviews pinpoint to difficulties in focusing the integrated policy plans on the right issues and getting stakeholders to work beyond policy and sectoral silos. Overall, **there should be stronger emphasis on using the integrated policy plans as a tool to put the right policy pieces into place for integrating service delivery for children with complex needs**. The years ahead will bring opportunities and potential for countries to continue learning from each other's experiences and recent initiatives.

# 1 Integrated policy plans for child well-being

**Integrated policy plans to promote child well-being are very popular across OECD countries.** For the past decade or longer, a good number of OECD countries and regions have been implementing integrated plans for child well-being, while in the last year or two several countries and regions have started to implement their first-ever.

The main motivations behind the integrated policy plan for child well-being is to **have a framework to develop and coordinate a cross-government agenda on child well-being and to promote cooperation on key child well-being priorities.** Having a framework to realise child rights is another common motivation, especially children's right to participate and the principle of the child's best interests.

Integrated policy plans can be a useful instrument to **strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration** between government ministries and agencies **around shared strategic goals.** To this aim, well-designed integrated plans are those that present a vision for child well-being that can unite actors around a common goal and that translate this vision into high-level priorities that governments and stakeholders take to set measurable goals and targets and to define the corresponding policy actions and programmes. Well-designed integrated plan also make clear the timeline for policy actions, who holds responsibility for implementation, and the budget allocation. Consultations with children and other important stakeholders are also key to inform the diagnostic assessment and to ensure that the policy priorities set by government are aligned with the needs and perspectives of children and their families.

## What is an integrated policy plan for child well-being?

The integrated policy plans for child well-being are different from one integrated policy plan to the next. This paper defines an integrated policy plan for child well-being as a policy document that sets out the government's approach to promoting child outcomes in several well-being domains. The integrated plan aims to integrate existing and sometimes competing policy initiatives into a cohesive strategy and to formalise coordination and cooperation across entities that are responsible for conducting policies in different areas. The integrated policy plan for child well-being may be one among several initiatives undertaken by governments to foster policy coordination in child policy areas.

The integrated policy plans for child well-being communicate to internal and external stakeholders, such as civil society and the wider public, what the government intends to do to improve outcomes for children. The integrated plans should provide a framework for all stakeholders – government ministries and agencies, and potentially civil society – to work together and take coordinated actions across several policy domains to achieve coherent goals and objectives for child well-being. In other words, governments use the integrated plan to outline clearly what they understand as the main issues for child well-being, what they wish to achieve, how they will go about this, what tools and instruments they will use, the resources they need, and who the main stakeholders are and what is expected from them.

**More than half of OECD countries (21 out of 34) have an integrated policy plan for child well-being** (Figure 1). Four countries, Costa Rica, Ireland, Japan (Box 1) and Spain, had in the recent past an integrated policy plan for child well-being and are in the process of developing a new one. One country, the Slovak Republic, had in the recent past an integrated policy plan for child well-being but has decided against renewing it.

### Box 1. Japan's Six Basic Principles for child and youth policies

Japan has recently introduced the Basic Act for Children's Policy, which set out six basic principles for the country's child and youth policies. The Act reflects the Constitution of Japan and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aims to comprehensively promote measures to achieve a society in which all children and young people lead the way for future generations, are able to establish the skills for lifelong development and thrive as independent individuals. In addition, the Act works to ensure that children and young people's rights are protected, regardless of their abilities or the environments surrounding them. These six basic principles are:

1. Ensure that all children and youth are respected as individuals, have their fundamental human rights guaranteed, and are protected from discrimination;
2. Ensure the well-being of all children and youth and guarantee a good quality of life. Ensure that all children and young people feel loved and protected and are granted equal access to education based on the spirit of the Basic Act on Education;
3. Ensure that all children and youth have opportunities to express their views on all matters affecting them in accordance with their age and maturity, and have opportunities to participate in various social activities;
4. Ensure that children and youth's views are respected, and their best interests are given due consideration in accordance with their age and maturity;
5. The family is the foundation for child-rearing. Parents and other legal guardians have primary responsibility for child rearing, but the state must ensure sufficient access to child-care support and an adequate nurturing environment for those children who cannot remain in their family home;
6. Establish a social environment where people can and want to have families and experience the joys of parenting.

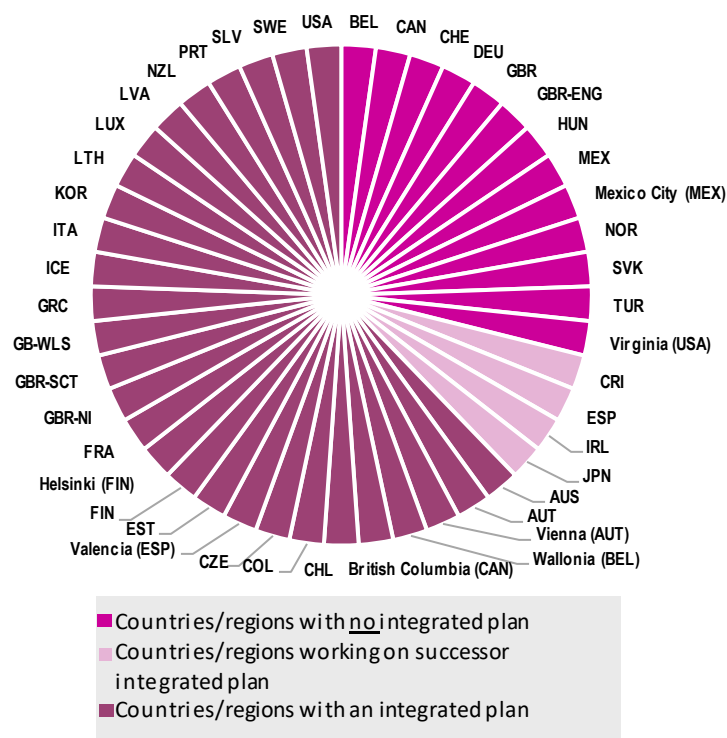
At the same time, Japan has established a new governmental agency, the Children and Families Agency, which will specifically focus on the well-being of children and young people. The Agency established a Council for the Promotion of Child-Related Measures to formulate Japan's next integrated plan. In preparing the integrated plan, the Council must devise the necessary measures to ensure that the views of children and young people are reflected, as well as the view of those raising children, and private-sector groups.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

Eight out of the eleven participating regions in the Questionnaire report an integrated policy plan for child well-being. Integrated plans for child well-being don't necessarily exist at national level, but may exist at the regional level, especially in countries with federal or devolved governments, for example, Canada, Belgium and the United Kingdom (Box 2).

### Figure 1. Most OECD countries have an integrated policy plan for child well-being

Countries and regions with or without an integrated plan for child well-being, or working on a successor integrated plan for child well-being



Note: Figure shows only respondent countries and regions to the Questionnaire, in total 34 OECD countries and eleven regions. "Working on successor integrated plan" means that the country is currently working to update or revise its integrated plan for child well-being.

Source: OECD Secretariat calculations based on the 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

#### Box 2. A snapshot of integrated policy plans for child well-being in federal OECD countries

Federal countries face special institutional and political constraints when it comes to developing integrated plans for child well-being. Very often, the related policy areas are the responsibility of regional governments, with federal governments only having a subsidiary role in shaping regional policies.

Integrated policy plans for child well-being at the national level are less common among central governments in OECD countries where there is a federal or devolved system of government. Four federal countries, Australia, Austria, Spain and the United States report an integrated plan for child well-being, with each country pursuing different approaches. For example, Australia chose to concentrate on one complex issue only, child maltreatment, with the aim of generating a system-wide response to the problem and successfully engaging policy portfolios beyond child protection and family services. Whereas the United States has gone down the route of seeking to improve policy coherence, both among and within federal agencies. For instance, the US' Administration for Children and Families Strategic Plan 2022 has five goals which intentionally cut across the Administration's programmes and recipient population to leverage the interconnectedness of its programmes and to ensure collaboration to generate change in the right direction. Recently, US Congress directed the establishment of the Children's Interagency Coordinating Council to foster greater coordination and transparency on child

policy across agencies and to examine and periodically report on a broad range of cross-cutting issues affecting child poverty and well-being.

At the state level, half of federal OECD countries (five out of ten) report at least one state or region that has its own integrated policy plan for child well-being. For example, the United Kingdom reports numerous efforts to improve policy integration at the regional level, with the devolved UK governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, each having an integrated policy plan for child well-being. These devolved governments have devolved responsibility for most policy areas directly affecting child well-being. Overall, their integrated plans share similarities, in so far as they stem from, and feed into, broader national efforts to promote well-being and adopt a long-term approach. However, Scotland's Children, Young People and Families Outcomes Framework is much more high-level. It focuses on providing a holistic picture and understanding of children and young people's well-being and whether the sum of collective actions at the local and national level is making a real difference. It lays out general principles for stakeholders to follow, which address how they need to work differently to deliver the expected change and what needs to be in place to improve outcomes. Wales's integrated plan is explicitly tied to the current programme of government and into achieving the national milestones, while Northern Ireland's aims to give coherence to the work of successive governments.

Some federal countries report multiple that policy integration is stronger in certain policy areas, reflecting the authority a region may have. For instance, Switzerland reports no single approach to policy integration for child well-being. Policy integration is stronger in this area of child welfare because the Swiss cantons assume broad responsibilities in this area. Nevertheless, policy integration generally focuses on specific issues attached to child welfare, for example, violence against children. The cantons vary in their approach to policy integration. For instance, some of the smaller cantons able to progress policy integration without the need to legislate.

Source: OECD 2022 Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

Most countries and regions use the integrated policy plan for child well-being to generate high-level support to drive a cross-government agenda on child well-being. Therefore, **most countries and regions engage in broad consultation processes to develop the integrated plan** to get buy-in and collective accountability for implementation. In many cases, countries and region have the parliament or ministerial cabinet approve the integrated plan.

### ***Age ranges and target groups covered***

**By and large, most countries and regions' integrated policy plans for child well-being address the needs of 0-17-year-olds.** A small number have a broader age coverage to address youth policy, specifically Ireland and New Zealand (0-24 years), Two regions, specifically Northern Ireland (UK) and British Columbia (Canada), extend the age coverage beyond 17 years of age for young care leavers only, and in the case of Northern Ireland, also for young adults with disabilities up to 21 years of age. Slovenia's integrated plan covers children from 0-14 years of age.

**Identifying priority groups can enable governments and non-government bodies to better target resources towards improving vulnerable children's outcomes.** More than half of the countries and regions identify priority groups of children for special attention. These priority groups are usually clearly defined and represent some of the most vulnerable children. For example, Korea identifies its priority groups as children with disabilities, children in out-of-home care, children in low-income families, and children with a migrant background, and Luxembourg identifies children with disabilities and children with a migrant background. Australia identifies four priority groups of children and families, which represents a shift from the previous strategy of not having set explicit target groups (Box 3). Finland identifies "children



in vulnerable positions” as its priority group, working from the basis that children may be vulnerable because of long-term structural discrimination (e.g., race), or because of situational factors, (e.g., being in the child protection system). Each Finnish government must define how it will and with which measures promote these children’s well-being and rights. Some countries and regions are looser with the framing of priority groups. For instance, Valencia (Spain) highlights focusing efforts on children at risk of social exclusion.

### Box 3. Focusing on all children or targeting the most vulnerable only? Learnings from Australia’s experience

In 2021, Australia launched its second integrated plan for child well-being aimed at achieving significant and sustained progress on reducing the rate of child maltreatment and its intergenerational impacts. Compared to the first integrated plan, the second integrated plan contains a few key differences relating to how the country will go about achieving its primary goal. One of these key differences is targeting four priority groups of children and families where children are at significant risk of coming into out-of-home care.

Focusing efforts on priority groups of children and families can make it easier to direct resources at children and families who are the most in need and deliver measures that are specific and culturally sensitive. Therefore, the first integrated plan’s final evaluation recommended Australia to take a more targeted approach in the successor integrated plan and to focus efforts exclusively on key groups of vulnerable children – rather than all children. One reason for this recommendation is the fact that certain groups of children and families are or remain over-represented in the child protection system, and therefore require specialised or intensive supports. For instance, the first integrated plan failed to end the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system and in out-of-home care. In fact, over the first integrated plan’s lifetime, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people subject to care and protection orders increased (PwC, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>).

Australia decided not to put the focus of second integrated plan exclusively on the most vulnerable, instead choosing to settle on a middle ground. Like the first integrated plan, the second integrated plan is not exclusively for vulnerable children, rather it is for all children and young people in Australia. However, the second integrated plan has clear priority groups of children and families consisting of those experiencing disadvantage or who are at higher risk of abuse and neglect. These four priority groups are: children and families with multiple and complex needs; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; children and young people with a disability and/or parents/carers with a disability; and children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care and transitioning into adulthood. None of these groups are mutually exclusive. Families are included in the categorisation in recognition of their importance for improving vulnerable children’s outcomes.

Australia hopes that the categorisation of vulnerable children and families into target groups will support broader consideration of the touchpoints these children and families have with the service system and enable governments and non-government bodies to better dedicate resources towards improving their outcomes. To this end, the second integrated plan takes a service system approach, focusing on policy and system levers that as a tool it can exert more of an influence over. The second integrated plan has four focus areas that, among other things, seek to improve service integration, information sharing, and improve the systems and service response to the target groups. In addition, the second integrated plan was developed with stronger consultations with children, young people and families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is a stronger alignment with broader government

commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as specific action plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and their families to implement all aspects of the integrated plan.

Source: Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 to 2031, (Department for Child Protection, 2021<sup>[9]</sup>).

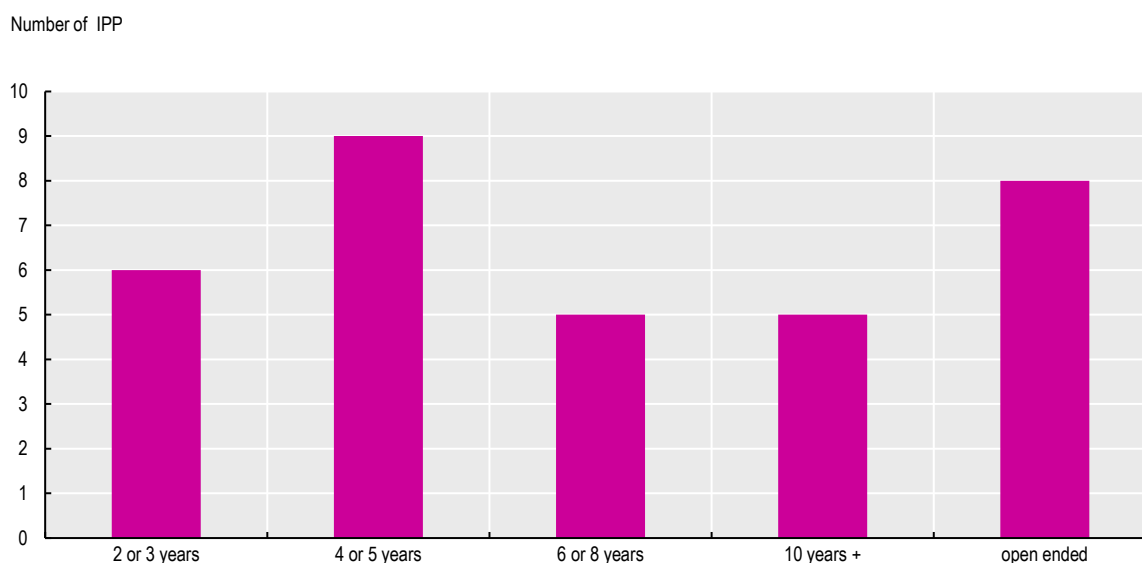
### Implementation timeframes

**Setting a timeframe for implementing the integrated policy plan for child well-being is important for making governments and administrations accountable for progressing the child well-being agenda.** Most countries and regions set a definite implementation timeframe to the integrated plan. Sometimes, legislation determines the implementation timeframe through requiring regular integrated plans for child well-being to be developed. For example, Italy has national legislation obligating the government to produce a new integrated plan every two years, while Japan must do so every five years. Most of the time, however, the integrated plan's underlying purpose seems to determine the implementation length; integrated plans with shorter implementation timeframes tend to identify a limited number of well-defined child well-being priorities requiring cross-government action, while those with longer implementation timeframes help the government to drive a long-term agenda for child well-being.

Around half of countries and regions set an implementation timeframe of between two to five years to deliver on well-defined child well-being priorities (Figure 2). Shorter implementation timeframes can enable governments to include only actions for which there is already an agreement to deliver. Though a few countries refer to the integrated plan as containing the government's commitments to child well-being, only Wales (UK) states that the integrated plan delivers child well-being activities in the current government's programme of work. By and large, these integrated plans' implementation timeframes are not aligned with electoral cycles.

**Figure 2. Around half of integrated policy plans for child well-being are implemented between two to five years**

Implementation timeframes for the integrated policy plan for child well-being



Source: OECD Secretariat calculations based on the 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.



To see through a long-term agenda for child well-being, **having a commitment for action that will outlive electoral cycles, government programmes or cabinet compositions is necessary.** For this reason, five countries and regions have an integrated policy plan whose implementation timeframes is for ten-years or longer, while eight have not set any end date. For instance, Chile's integrated plan has a 12-year implementation timeframe as the country uses the integrated plan to establish its new institutional arrangements for child policy and children's services at the local and national level. Chile understands that it will need the commitment of several governments to establish these new institutional arrangements. **Setting a longer timeframe is recognisant of the fact that new policies take time to properly implement and longer again to see the expected outcomes.**

**Longer implementation timeframes can be indicative of strong cross-party support for the child well-being policy agenda and the time-consuming processes behind reaching a consensus.** Both Finland (open ended) and New Zealand (open ended) developed their integrated policy plans from a basis of strong cross-party support and broad and intensive consultations with stakeholders. For example, Finland used a cross-party committee to develop the integrated plan and gave it ten months to complete its work. This committee was composed of members from all parliamentary groups and permanent experts on child rights, including representatives of non-governmental organisations and the Children's Commissioner. The committee was chaired by the Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services and vice-chaired by the Minister of Education and Culture, with the support of a secretariat consisting of public officials from the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Education and Culture and representatives from civil society organisations. The committee has proposed that every government produce an implementation plan for the integrated plan, in order to promote long-term implementation and to make it clear what actions each government will be accountable for. Strong cross-party support should make it likely that future governments will continue to endorse the integrated policy plan.

**Introducing legislation may be necessary to embed the integrated policy plan beyond electoral cycles.** Depending on the country context, legislation is not always a straightforward option. New Zealand has legislation, which in and of itself is indicative of good cross-party support for child well-being. New Zealand's legislation requires the government to report annually on progress in achieving the integrated policy plan's desired outcomes for children and young people and to review every three years the integrated policy plan itself. It is still too early to know how successor governments will assume ownership of this child well-being agenda, and the power of legislation in this regard for reinforcing accountability. Chile and Japan have recently introduced legislation requiring the establishment of a new integrated policy plan for child well-being. Chile's legislation requires each plan to have a nine-year implementation timeframe and for evaluations to occur every three years, while Japan requires for the plan to be revised and reported on to the government every five years.

Scotland and the United States' integrated policy plans are very different to the rest. Both focus on laying down principles or ways of working together to achieve shared child and youth outcomes, instead of identifying specific policy actions. Each plan contains an outcomes framework to provide a means for measuring the impact of collective action on child and youth well-being. The implementation timeframes are also open ended.

### ***Reporting arrangements***

**Integrated plans for child well-being should be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis,** in order to ensure that decision-making and budget allocations contribute to achieving their strategic objectives and to enable governments to make adjustments, if needed. Nearly all countries and regions, except for Italy and the United States, have a formal requirement to report on the integrated plan's progress and implementation (Table 1).

**Table 1. Reporting arrangements for the integrated plan for child well-being**

Country/region	Authorities to which reporting is made	Frequency of reporting
Australia	to the federal government; to regional government; to lead minister	regular but not yet determined
Austria	-	every five years
Austria (Vienna)	to the city council to the child and youth parliament	Yearly
Belgium (Wallonia)	to the government	Yearly
Canada (British Colombia)	to the cabinet	Yearly
Chile	to the president	Yearly
Colombia	to national parliament to regional parliament to municipalities	Yearly
Costa Rica	to cross-government & civil society body	twice a year
Czech Republic	to the government	regular
Estonia	to the Minister of Finance	Yearly
France	to steering and monitoring committee	Yearly
Finland	to the government	at end of government term
Finland (Helsinki)	to city council	yearly at end of government term
Greece	to the government; to Children's Ombudsperson	yearly at end of implementation period;
Iceland	to the government	every year
Italy	none	
Ireland	to lead minister	Yearly
Japan*	to the government	every five years
Korea	to the lead minister	every one-two years
	to a government committee	every year
Latvia	to the Cabinet	every two years
	to the parliament	yearly
Lithuania	-	every two years at the end of the implementation period
Luxembourg	to the public	every two years
New Zealand	to the parliament	yearly first full review three years in
Portugal	to a government committee	Yearly
Slovenia	to the government	Yearly
Spain		yearly mid-term at the end of implementation
Spain (Valencia)	-	yearly at the end of implementation

Country/region	Authorities to which reporting is made	Frequency of reporting
Sweden	to the parliament	regular
United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)	to the government	every three years
United Kingdom (Scotland)	to the public	regular
United Kingdom (Wales)	to government sub-committee to the Minister for Health and Social Services	Yearly
United States	-	n/a

Note: \*Details on Costa Rica, Ireland and Spain refer to now expired integrated plans for child well-being. Details on Japan refer to successor plan, which is still under development. Cells were left blank when information was not available.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

**Most countries and regions require reporting on the integrated policy plan to happen regularly, at least once a year** (Table 1). Austria, Finland and Japan require reporting the least frequently. Finland's reporting obligations coincide with the end of the government term of office, as the country intends to implement the integrated plan over the long term, or in other words, over the lifetime of many governments. Here, reporting serves the function of holding each government to account for its progress in implementing the integrated plan, Finland's reporting entails the Secretary General of the National Child Strategy from the Prime Minister's Office presenting a monitoring report to the Ministerial working Group on Health and Social Services. This report must contain a concise picture of changes to child, youth and family well-being during the government term, and a structured description of progress realised against measures set out in the implementation plan and the integrated plan's objectives.

By far, **the most common authority to which reporting on the integrated policy plan's progress is made is to the parliament or to the government itself**. This is followed by an inter-ministerial committee or to a steering committee, but only in a small number of countries (Table 1). Only three countries choose to report to a government minister instead of to the whole government. Korea and Ireland report to the lead minister, while Estonia has the lead minister, in this case the Minister for Health and Welfare Minister, report to the Minister for Finance. Most countries clarified that reporting is supported by an activity report, which all involved ministries feed into.

**Reporting is rarely made to children or informed by their views and perspectives, despite children's involvement in the design of the integrated plan being commonplace** (see Children's involvement ). Only Vienna (Austria) stipulates reporting on the integrated policy plan's progress to the city's child and youth parliament, while New Zealand has legislation requiring ongoing consultation with children in the integrated plan's development, on any changes that are made to it, and if new versions are developed. It is important to note that New Zealand's strong ongoing engagement with children is as much driven by the legislation itself as by increased political support for child participation in the country (Brown et al., 2020<sub>[10]</sub>).

**Taking children's views into account in monitoring and evaluation can be challenging since a good of chunk of the integrated plan's actions concern administrative issues**. For example, Wallonia (Belgium) evaluated its previous integrated policy plan using interviews with children to elicit their views on progress and to inform recommendations for the successor integrated plan. This evaluation found that the integrated plan did not deal with issue children considered as priorities, putting forward the need to move away from an overly administrative framework towards reinforcing greater coherence between the different bodies to develop a plan that more comprehensively addresses children's concerns and interests (CEMÉA, 2019<sub>[11]</sub>).

**Enabling child and youth stakeholders to monitor and evaluate policy plans can increase transparency and accountability** (OECD, 2020<sub>[12]</sub>). A couple of countries have children participating in the consultation bodies attached to the lead entity coordinating the integrated plan. These consultation

bodies provide a forum to consult children regularly on the integrated plan's progress. For example, Wales (UK) includes children and young people in its integrated plan's external advisory group, alongside partners from outside the civil service and from the public and third sector. Portugal's National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Young people, the country's main entity for child policy and services, has made the National Council of Children and Young People a permanent consultation body.

## Design of the integrated policy plans

The integrated policy plans for child well-being need to clearly set out in documentation the overall goal for child well-being that can be taken as a reference by all actors. The **goal for child well-being needs to be translated into priorities that can be actioned**.

### *Documentation*

Across the OECD, **the integrated plans for child well-being consist of different types of documentation**. Around half of the integrated plans consist of one primary document only, which is mostly the countries or regions where the integrated plan's implementation timeframe is relatively short. Countries and regions may refer to this primary document as a strategy or action plan for children, child well-being or child rights.

The remaining integrated plans, have, in addition to the primary document, **separate implementation plans** that are published on a one-off or periodic basis. By and large, this applies to countries and regions where the implementation timeframes are longer, but not exclusively so. Countries and regions may refer to the implementation plan as an action plan or a programme of action. Countries and regions require the implementation plans to be consistent with the integrated plan's overall vision and its guiding principles, as well as focus areas.

Developing separate implementation plans can have some advantages. **Separate implementation plans can allow the time for some maturation of the integrated plan's implementation structures and the space to determine the integrated plan's exact measures**. Chile, for instance, took three years to develop the implementation plan for its integrated plan, while Northern Ireland (UK) is likely to take a similar length of time to issue the first of three implementation plans for its 10-year integrated plan. Successive implementation plans can also help renew ownership of the child well-being agenda. As already discussed, Finland requires every government to develop a new implementation plan when they take office to make each government accountable for child well-being and for progressing the integrated plan's objectives, while New Zealand requires the government to review the integrated plan every three years.

### *Setting the overall goal (i.e., the vision)*

Countries and regions give direction to the child well-being agenda by setting an overall goal or vision for child well-being in the integrated plan. The integrated plan's vision is a high-level description of the desired outcomes, scenarios, and actions for child well-being. The vision aims to unite actors around a common goal. It spells out what the government is seeking to achieve and what the key drivers of child well-being might be. Coming together to determine the vision for child well-being is an important part of agenda-setting phase as it requires identifying and defining which problems need attention. It can also be a precursor to change as it may represent a shift in how a problem is perceived and a consensus on what needs to happen.

Countries and regions typically set a vision for child well-being that is ambitious or even aspirational. In most cases, these visions can only be realised over the longer term, regardless of whether the integrated plan's implementation timeframe is short or long (Box 4). **There are advantages to setting a vision for**

**child well-being that is only achievable over the longer term, including helping to keep longer term policy objectives on the table.**

#### **Box 4. Selected visions for the child well-being policy agenda**

Many of the visions for child well-being recognise children's right to well-being as well as to realising their potential in life. These visions are sometimes aligned with child rights and to the CRC. Finland laid out its overall goal of laying down a sustainable, consistent and lasting foundation for national child and family policies and ensuring that fundamental and human rights obligations are met. Chile outlined a vision where "by 2025, children and adolescents have the conditions that guarantee the fulfilment of their rights, according to their life course, and without distinction". Korea wishes to respect and realise child rights, while also promoting children's sense of happiness and life satisfaction.

The vision for child well-being often recognises the fundamental need of children to grow up in a safe and caring family environment. The Czech Republic set a primary objective of where children and young people in the Czech Republic have a good quality of life, grow up in a safe family environment and have equal opportunities to develop to their full potential. The vision can also set the bar high in terms of what achievements are sought for children. Ireland laid out its vision of being "one of the best small countries in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future". New Zealand outlined its vision succinctly as being "the best place in the world for children and young people".

The vision for child well-being can also highlight taking strong action against childhood inequality and providing all children with a fair start in life. Wales's (UK) ambition is "for children, no matter their background, nor where they come from or live to all have the best start in life and go on to lead the kind of lives they want to live". Slovenia's overall goal is "to raise the level of child welfare, ensure equal opportunities and rights for all children, strengthen protection, and improve the opportunities for inclusion and participation of all children, regardless of their personal circumstances".

The vision for child well-being can also acknowledge children's vulnerability. Australia's vision is for the countries' children and young people to reach their full potential by growing up safe and supported, free from harm and neglect. Australia will assure this by making significant and sustained progress in reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect, and its intergenerational impacts.

Some countries have taken a different approach, using the vision to communicate that there will be a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to promoting child well-being. Portugal set the vision of its National Strategy for the Rights of the Child as "consolidating a strategic and holistic approach, based on a collective commitment, to build a sustainable future for children and youth, and the protection of their rights". Northern Ireland (UK) foresees government departments and other stakeholders working together to improve the well-being of children and young people living in Northern Ireland and to achieve positive, long-lasting outcomes. Estonia has an overall vision that connects resolving the demographic challenge of an ageing population to creating a child and family friendly society "to improve the well-being and quality of life of children and families, thereby promoting the birth rate".

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

### ***Defining high-level priorities***

The **integrated policy plan's vision needs to be translated into priorities which governments and stakeholders then use to design consistent and coherent policies.** Across the OECD, countries and regions usually form priorities from one of either two main approaches: selecting several key focus areas or defining a set of child well-being outcomes.

Most countries and regions go down the route of determining **key focus areas**. These focus areas are also sometimes referred to as strategic objectives. The integrated policy plans contain a varying number of focus areas, from as few as two in Latvia to as many as 11 in Finland. Most focus areas concern broad policy actions that the government has committed to undertake to the benefit of children. Popular examples of broad policy actions include increasing early intervention, improving access to quality health care, protecting children from violence, and tackling child and family poverty and material deprivation. The focus areas can also concern capacity building efforts to strengthen governance arrangements to support effective implementation and to strengthen the evidence base for child well-being policies and children's services. Examples include improving cross-government collaboration, promoting systematic monitoring and evaluation, strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability, and promoting child participation. Overall, the balance between the two types of focus areas swings in favour of policy actions over capacity building. **Sweden stands apart in this respect because the country chooses to concentrate its integrated plan squarely on developing the government capacity and infrastructure for child well-being.**

A smaller number of countries and regions frame their high-level priorities around achieving a set of defined child well-being outcomes. A child well-being outcome expresses what children and young people should have or be able to be, and what types of supports they should receive from the government and in their families. Working towards achieving shared well-being outcomes gives a sharper focus to cross-government work. It helps with planning as different stakeholders are required to connect their contribution to the shared outcomes.

The interconnected nature of child well-being means that the child well-being outcomes overlap and at least in some cases, promoting one area of children's lives requires improving outcomes in, and/or connections with other areas (OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>). Northern Ireland (UK), for example, has eight outcomes for children and young people that are interconnected and designed around promoting well-being.<sup>3</sup> Vienna's (Austria) approach is slightly different. Vienna does not identify outcomes per se but rather nine broad goals for children and young people, which then spell out the type of connected outcomes they will contribute to. For example, the 'opportunities and future' goal sees children and young people having the opportunity to develop their interests and talents and their families having a decent place to live and getting the support they need. This goal also feeds into the achievement of other goals, for instance, 'leisure and culture' and 'health and well-being'.

### ***Policy domains focused on***

Countries and regions identify actions and measures in their integrated plans that cross several policy domains. **Child protection is the most popular policy domain** by far, with nearly all integrated plans incorporating child protection actions and measures. This is followed by access to social and leisure activities (covered by 25 integrated plans), and child participation and mental health (covered by

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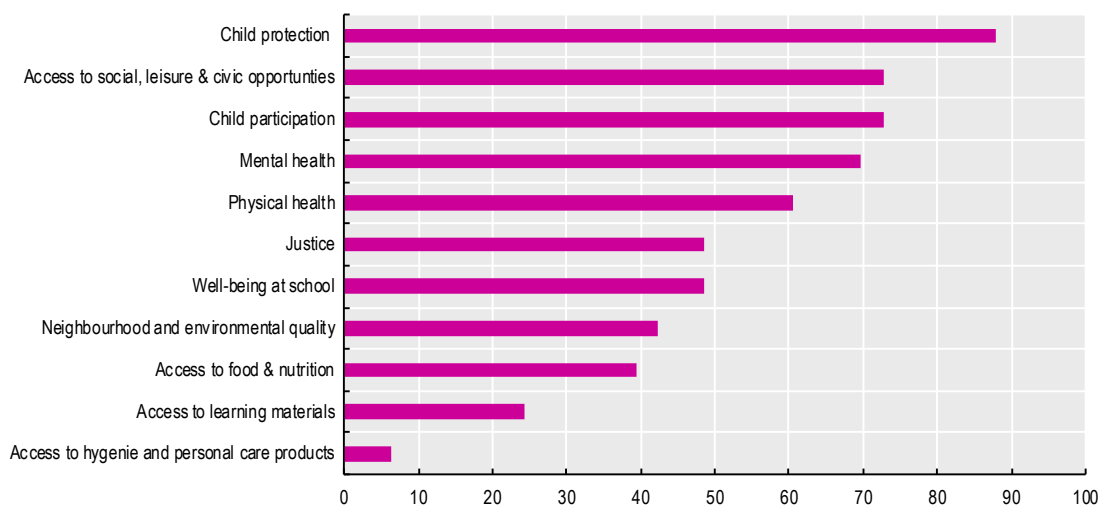
<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland's Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 is framed around eight outcomes which are designed to promote well-being. They are: physical and mental health; enjoyment of play and leisure; learning and achievement; living in safety and with stability; economic and environmental well-being; making a positive contribution to society; living in a society which respects their rights; and living in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

24 integrated plans). The least covered policy domain is access to hygiene and personal care products, which only two integrated plans cover (Figure 3).

By and large, **countries and regions focus their integrated plans on multiple policy domains** illustrated in Figure 3. Most countries and regions focus on between three to seven of these policy domains. New Zealand and Portugal focus on the highest number of policy domains, at 11 and 10 each respectively. Australia and Sweden focus their integrated plans one policy domain only. The policy approaches that these countries take to promote child well-being can explain the narrower coverage of policy domains (see Different policy approaches to promoting child well-being).

### Figure 3. Most integrated plans incorporate child protection policies while fewer address children's access to learning materials and personal care products

Policy domains covered by integrated policy plans, by percentage



Note: Figure refer to the share of integrated policy plans for child well-being that contain actions in the listed policy domains only. Figure shows the breakdown by policy domain of 33 integrated policy plans for child well-being.

Source: OECD Secretariat calculations based on the 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

### Children's involvement

**Most countries and regions involve children when preparing the integrated policy plan for child well-being.** Some also involve parents and caregivers, the children's services workforce, and child representative groups, which can give extra weight to children's voices. In many cases, it is apparent that these consultations with children represent the largest effort to date to include children in policy processes.

Children were most often asked for their views on the integrated policy plan's priorities and content, or their thoughts on how to improve child-related services and supports. Several countries and regions asked children to act as advisors, consulting children on much broader matters, such as what well-being mean to them or what they think their country/region should change, or on global issues like achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Running **special focus groups and/or using established child and youth participation structures were favoured for child consultations.** Using established participation structures opens the possibility to making children's participation less superficial and more inclusive. Luxembourg, for example, consulted its Superior Council of Youth and the Youth Parliament, as well as the youth clubs (les maisons des jeunes)

operating at the commune level. Luxembourg also consulted children at the annual Children's Conference (CHICO) to seek their opinions on the themes covered by the integrated plan. Similarly, Portugal consulted children and young people at the Voices of Students conference, applying the opinions and suggestions collected to the country's diagnosis of what the integrated plan should address. Chile undertook a very long consultation process via the National Council for Childhood to gather information and inputs for the integrated plan. This consultation process took three years to complete, reaching nearly two million children and young people and in the final year a 90% communal coverage.

**Including vulnerable or marginalised groups of children in child consultations is essential and yet is not sufficiently done.** Only a few countries and regions were explicit about taking measures to ensure the participation of vulnerable or marginalised groups of children in child consultations, and reported special efforts in this direction. Vulnerable and marginalised children are typically harder to reach. They are less likely to be part of established participation structures and also, when they are given the opportunity to participate in consultations, they might be less equipped (Forde et al., 2020<sup>[13]</sup>). Australia, Vienna (Austria), Finland, Slovak Republic, New Zealand, Wales (UK) and United States reported running focus groups that drew from a wide range of vulnerable groups, for example, children in out-of-home care, children with disabilities, and children with a refugee or recent immigrant backgrounds. Costa Rica and Finland adapted questionnaires for children from Indigenous communities, while Valencia (Spain) used specially designed questionnaires to consult children in receipt of support services. Not all efforts to engage vulnerable children were as successful as hoped. For example, Australia reported still failing to reach the most marginalised children because of their poor engagement with or links to services.

**It's not always clear how children's views and opinions contribute to shaping policy** (Byrne and Lundy, 2015<sup>[14]</sup>). To some extent, the same is true when it comes to the integrated policy plans for child well-being. Only a few countries report that the consultations with children informed the integrated plan's diagnostic assessment or confirmed (most of) the integrated plan priorities. In the case of New Zealand, an exploration of the impact of child participation on its integrated plan' development found that children's participations contributed to the introduction of an outcome area concerning being accepted, respected and connected, as the government responded to the insights heard from children and young people on these points. Moreover, the understanding of the outcome area relating to safety shifted from concerning safety from harm to placing a greater emphasis on children feeling loved and nurtured (Brown et al., 2020<sup>[10]</sup>).

**Countries should be clearer about how children's views are taken on board or accommodated.** Child participation requires a commitment to follow-up processes and activities, including providing children with information on how their participation has influenced any outcomes (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009<sup>[15]</sup>). Northern Ireland (UK) produced a report on its integrated plan's consultations, which made very clear what children and other stakeholders, including the Children's Commissioner and parents, thought of all components of the draft integrated plan and their preferences, from monitoring and evaluation options to the definition of outcome areas (DE, 2018<sup>[16]</sup>).

Children's perceptions on how well governments respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised children matter for trust in government. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the OECD Youth and COVID-19 Survey found that youth organisations were more likely to report a decrease in their trust in government when there was the perception that government had not done enough to support vulnerable groups of young people (OECD, 2022<sup>[17]</sup>) Negative perceptions of government early in life can carry forward throughout the lifecycle (OECD, 2022<sup>[18]</sup>)



## Different policy approaches to promoting child well-being

**Countries and regions pursue a variety of policy approaches in their integrated policy plans to promote child well-being.** These policy approaches are informed by the key priorities, the types of capacity they wish to develop, as well as the understanding of what matters for child well-being. Each approach has advantages but also challenges.

It is possible to breakdown these policy approaches into four categories: **child rights, child protection, and health, and well-being.** In all policy approaches, **the integrated plans aim to address cross-cutting issues that children face, and to strengthen the integration of measures to address them.** These approaches reveal different routes to promoting child well-being and to making efforts more effective, either by targeting efforts towards children receiving child protection services, or by targeting efforts to improve a particular set of outcomes or progress certain rights. It should be noted that these policy approaches are not mutually exclusive.

Anti-poverty plans are not included among the integrated plans referenced in this paper. Though it is common for countries to have a range of measures to tackle child poverty, including and not limited to income supports, these measures are often part of a wider package of measures for which children are not the direct or sole target. For this reason, anti-poverty plans are excluded from the current analysis.

Countries may have more than one integrated plan for child well-being falling under different approaches, as the result of the dynamics of policy development in the areas that are governed by different bodies within each country. This can cause duplications and overlaps. **Therefore, one challenge is shaping these integrated plans in such a way that they complement each other rather than following parallel paths.**

### *Child rights approach*

In many countries, the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC) in 1989 serves as a basis and motivation for the development of an integrated policy plan for child well-being. Twelve countries and two regions among the whole sample of jurisdictions covered in the Questionnaire have an integrated policy plan to progress implementation of the CRC (Table 2). These child-rights integrated plans have common actions, including applying the CRC's general principles and developing the CRC's general measures of implementation, and promoting a culture of respect for child rights. However, countries and regions find it tricky to move beyond superficial implementation of the CRC and to meaningfully measure progress in realising child rights.

**Table 2. Countries and regions taking a child-rights approach to the integrated plan for child well-being**

Country/region	Integrated plan	Implementation timeframe	Lead entity
Wallonia (BEL)	Action Plan on the Rights of the Child 2020-2024	4 years	Ministry of Children, Culture, the Media and Women's Rights
Chile	National Policy on Children and Adolescents 2015-2025 National Action Plan for Children and Adolescents 2018-2025	9 years	Ministry of Social Development,
Colombia	(i) State Policy for the Comprehensive Development of Early Childhood from Zero to Forever (ii) National Policy on Childhood and Adolescence 2018-2030	open ended	(i) Intersectoral Commission for the Integral Care of Early Childhood (ii) National Family Welfare System

Country/region	Integrated plan	Implementation timeframe	Lead entity
Costa Rica	National Agenda for Children and Adolescents: Goals and Commitments 2015-2021 National Policy Plan for Children and Adolescents 2009-2021	12 years	State children agency
Czech Republic	The National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021-2029	8 years	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Finland	The National Child Strategy Implementation Plan for the National Strategy 2022-	open ended	Prime Minister's Office (up until 2023) Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (from 2023 onwards)
Greece	National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child (2021-2023)	3 years	National Mechanism for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Action Plan on the Rights of the Child
Iceland	Child Friendly Iceland: Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 2021	open ended	Ministry of Education and Welfare
Korea	The 2nd Basic Child Policy Plan 2020-2024	4 years	Ministry of Health and Welfare
Luxembourg	Together for the Rights of the Child 2022-2026	4 years	Ministry of National Education, Children & Youth
Portugal	National Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2021-2024	4 years	Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Young People, Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security
Slovenia	Programme for Children 2020-2025	5 years	Council for Children and Families
Spain	National Strategic Plan for Childhood and Adolescence 2013-2016	4 years	Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030
Valencia (Spain)	the Valencian Strategy for Children and Adolescents 2022-2026	4 years	Interdepartmental Commission for Children and Adolescents
Sweden	National Strategy on the Rights of the Child in Sweden 2010	open ended	Child Rights Unit, Centre of government

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

**All integrated policy plans for child well-being refer to child rights principles and standards** – albeit to varying degrees. The child-rights integrated plans are generally more intentional with their application of the CRC's general principles, using them as guiding principles to drive implementation and priority setting (Box 5). For instance, Costa Rica uses the CRC's four general principles to guide implementation but adds two additional principles to emphasise positive discrimination and children's evolving capacities. Czech Republic's focus areas closely reflect three of the CRC general principles, specifically, non-discrimination, the right to be heard and to express own views, and the child's best interests. Chile structures its focus areas using a common approach to grouping the CRC's articles into four basic rights: survival, development, protection and participation. The child rights integrated plans can also be explicit about taking the concluding comments from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's country periodic review to set the focus areas and priorities. This is the case for Wallonia (Belgium), Finland, Luxembourg, and Portugal.

### Box 5. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: the four general principles and general measures of implementation

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the leading international treaty on children's rights. One of the advantages of the CRC as a framework for child policy is that it is so comprehensive that it would be rare not to be able to link a policy initiative to one or more of its goals (Byrne and Lundy, 2019<sup>[19]</sup>). The CRC's provisions are detailed and comprehensive, covering all aspects of children's lives, from play to education to family and health care. It contains special provisions for children who are especially vulnerable, like those without parental care and children in conflict with the law (Kilkelly, 2019<sup>[20]</sup>). The CRC is "elastic enough" to address many aspects of children's lives that have emerged in recent year, while some of its weaknesses have been addressed in subsequent human rights treaties. Thus, despite being three decades old by now, the CRC continues to offer a broad range of substantive rights that are relevant to any policy impacting on children (Byrne and Lundy, 2019<sup>[19]</sup>).

The CRC has four general principles, which guide the interpretation and implementation of the rest of the CRC. These four general principles are: non-discrimination (Article 2); best interests of the child (Article 3); right to life, child's survival and development (Article 6); and the child's right to express own view and to be heard (Article 12). Together, the four general principles clarify the desired outcomes from each right as set out in the CRC and the approach needed for their realisation (Hanson and Lundy, 2017<sup>[21]</sup>). For example, the best interests of the child principle laid down in Article 3 has been described as the instrument which provides the link between the theory and the reality. This principle is broad, flexible and responsive. But on the same merits, it lacks a precise definition and contains an abundance of subjectivity which risks negating the greater purpose of child rights. This principle should be applied in all forms of interventions regarding children. It is also explicitly referred to in a number of other articles as a determining factor, such as the right of the child to live with her or his parents (Article 9) and matters regarding adoption (Article 21). In practice, however, the best interest's principle is principally used to determine the best interests of the child in individual cases, rather than in legislative processes. (Zermatten, 2010<sup>[22]</sup>).

The CRC has general measures of implementation (GMIs). The GMIs provide the foundation for all efforts to realise children's right. The GMIs are sometimes described as the 'governance architecture' for child rights, as they make the roles and responsibilities for implementation of the CRC clear and in this way support accountability (Collins, 2019<sup>[23]</sup>). The Committee on the Rights of the Child outlines States parties' obligations to develop GMIs in General Comment No.5 (2003<sup>[24]</sup>).

The GMIs underline the importance of the processes, mechanisms, and of the efforts of various actors to address implementation gaps in child rights. GMIs include the following elements: law reform and jurisprudence; budgeting; integrated plans for child well-being; monitoring processes and mechanisms; comprehensive data collection systems; training on child rights for those who work with children and general awareness raising; independent human rights institutions (e.g. children ombudsperson and children commissioner); coordination efforts and mechanisms; participation of civil society; international cooperation; and ratification and implementation of other relevant international standard. Many interconnected challenges stand in the way of developing and applying GMIs, including lack of disaggregated data, limited financial, technical and human resources, and due regard for children as distinct right holders (Collins, 2019<sup>[23]</sup>).

The child-rights integrated policy plans can focus efforts **on developing or reinforcing the legal and institutional systems to guarantee child rights**. This is done with the view of addressing policy fragmentation and to promote a culture of respect for child rights. The latter can be regarded as lacking and as a barrier to child well-being. Chile, Colombia and Korea, for example, focus on installing a stronger legal and institutional system for child rights, while also dealing with many substantive issues. For instance, Korea wants to integrate a child-centred perspective into all government policy to make children's happiness a national priority, in order to enhance the country's children's subjective well-being and reduce the intense competition they are under to succeed academically (MHW, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[26]</sup>). Sweden's integrated plan focuses solely on legal and institutional issues as the country uses the integrated plan to mainstream child rights, from legislation's compliance with the CRC to incorporating child rights principles into policy-making processes and practice. Sweden's integrated plan is different, not only because it is open ended, but also it is not supported by implementation plans, relying more on its Child Rights Unit in the centre of government to steer coordination. Similarly, Iceland's integrated plan focuses on the CRC's general measures of implementation, in particular, general awareness raising, improving coordination and reviewing legislation for compliance with the CRC. Here, Iceland also concentrates on getting all municipalities in the country to systematically implement the CRC.

**Countries need to figure out how to progress the child-rights integrated policy plans beyond superficially implementing the CRC and towards clearly linking policy to the CRC's specific and relevant standards.** There is a tendency to link child policy documents to child rights without making the necessary linkages to the CRC's provisions in a very consistent or focussed way (Byrne and Lundy, 2015<sup>[14]</sup>). This can, in part, come down to policy makers not having a sound knowledge of the CRC to apply it to policy and practice and their need for practical guidance. For instance, Spain identifies poor awareness of child rights among the civil services as both a barrier to and motivating factor for retaining an integrated plan for child well-being (DGFCS, 2018<sup>[27]</sup>).

Finland is a good example of a country where the integrated policy plan for children is linked clearly to the provisions of the CRC. Finland connects each focus area with the specific and relevant standards of the CRC, while creating the governance architecture to realise child rights features across many of the measures set out in the implementation plan (Finnish Government, 2022<sup>[28]</sup>). Finland also set the precondition of implementing the integrated plan through existing decision-making and operational structures to help it endure its long-term implementation.

**There are special challenges to monitoring the progress of the child-rights integrated policy plans.** Monitoring of child rights should involve the use of indicators that, on top reporting on children's lives, can also report on the actions of governments and other duty holders, as well as on the many factors making up the implementation process. In other words, indicators need to be capable of assisting the analysis and understanding of how governments and other duty bears meet their obligations under the CRC and the impact on children's lives. Moreover, the processes behind developing child rights indicators are just as critical as the choice of indicators themselves as children need to be meaningfully involved across all stages (Vaghri, Krappmann and Doek, 2019<sup>[29]</sup>; Tisdall, 2015<sup>[30]</sup>). Chile provides the clearest example of monitoring building on these elements. Chile identifies indicators to measure progress under the four axes of child rights and refers to which articles of the CRC indicators relate to. Chile also identifies indicators relating to integrated plan's actions and provides information to indicate if the action contains child participation and whether it upholds the principle of the child's best interest.

### ***Child protection approach***

The CRC is broad in scope, and thus it can be deemed appropriate to develop dedicated integrated **plans to address the specific and often complex needs of particularly disadvantaged or vulnerable groups of children**. This is the case for integrated policy plans with a child protection focus. Six countries and one region among the whole sample of jurisdictions covered have developed an integrated plan to

build a better functioning child protection system (Table 3). The common actions across these child-protection integrated plans include focusing efforts on the most vulnerable children, improving collaboration between statutory and non-statutory actors, and implementing a national approach to child protection across the jurisdiction.

**Table 3. Countries and regions taking a child protection approach to the integrated plan for child well-being**

Country/region	Integrated plan	Implementation timeframe	Lead entity
Australia	Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031	10 years	Department of Social Services
British Columbia (CAN)	Ministry of Children and Family Development Service Plan for 2021-2023/24	2 years	Ministry of Children and Family Development
Estonia	Strategy of Children and Families 2012-2020 The Programme for Children and Families 2022-25	8 years	Ministry of Social Affairs
France	Childhood Pact (Pacte pour l'enfance) 2020-22	3 years	Secretariat of State for Children and Families, Ministry of Solidarity and Health
Latvia	The Policy Guidelines for Children, Youth and Family Policy 2022-2027	6 years	Ministry of Welfare
Lithuania	Child Welfare Action Plan 2022-2023	2 years	Ministry of Social Security and Labour
United States	Administration for Children and Families Strategic Plan 2022	open ended	Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

All the child protection integrated policy plans contain a body of actions aimed at **improving outcomes of children who are at risk of entering or are already in the child protection system**, for example, children in out-of-home care and young care leavers. For example, Lithuania concentrates actions on improving provision of complex services for children who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing harm, supporting family-based care and parenting competencies. Lithuania has three focus areas, which relate to service development and workforce capability. Australia and British Columbia (Canada) use the integrated plan to deliver on national government commitments to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, who are also over-represented in the child protection system. For example, British Columbia's integrated plan has a goal which recognises the right of Indigenous families to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, responding to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.

The child protection integrated policy plans often aim to **promote stronger collaboration between statutory services and local community services**. To this end, the child protection integrated plans contain measures to avert a too top-down heavy approach to children protection, to maximise the community's contribution to children's well-being and protection, and to increase prevention. For example, British Columbia (Canada) has one focus area around supporting improved outcomes and prioritising resources in collaboration with communities and services providers. One measure involves the lead Ministry developing a Prevention and Family Support Framework with partners and services providers. Estonia aims to get all actors in the child protection system working better together and following similar principles. Estonia has one measure that involves local authorities creating local support plans for children and families to contribute to a better functioning child protection system. Estonia's social insurance board, which is responsible for coordinating cross-sectoral cooperation, must advise local authorities on their support plans and ensure a strong focus on prevention and research.

Some child protection integrated policy plans, for example, Australia, Estonia and France, seek to implement a common approach to child protection across administrations. In general, **developing a common approach to child protection can consist of working on a common understanding of the issues facing vulnerable children and families**, harmonising legislation, policies and processes across the jurisdiction, and the use of a public health orientation, among other things.

**Australia is the furthest along, continuing the work started with its first integrated plan to embed a public health approach to child protection.** Australia has struggled to generate a system-wide response to child protection and to engage key policy portfolios outside the typical child protection portfolios (e.g., housing, education and skills). A major cause of poor engagement was the change to the integrated plan's governance arrangements halfway through implementation (see Leadership of the child well-being policy agenda). The integrated plan's design also caused problems, leading stakeholders to focus less on improving prevention and early intervention provision. For instance, the integrated plan's language around abuse and neglect resulted in a natural focus being directed to child protection services, while its supporting outcomes and indicators were focused on statutory measures (PwC, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). To address these issues, the second integrated plan emphasises the integration of government services through redesigning systems to allow shared agency and jurisdictional data and to strengthen the interface between child and family services (e.g., domestic and family violence, disability, and housing).

Differences in France's departments' capacity to implement the integrated plan's measures challenges efforts to implement a national approach to child protection. Part of France's integrated plan (la Stratégie nationale de prévention et de protection de l'enfance) seeks to ensure that all children in France have a common set of rights, improved coherence between national and territorial governance, and a better understanding of child protection data. So far, **France has reformed child protection governance arrangements, merging the four existing national child protection agencies into a single new agency to manage child protection and prevention services across the whole country.** France's national government has issued multi-year contracts to the departments to implement the integrated plan's measures, yet not all the country's department can enter these contracts because they don't yet meet the set criteria. For instance, one criterion is that the department is ready to accelerate the transition of child protection services to more preventive measures. Nevertheless, 30 departments signed contracts in the first year, increasing to 40 by the second year (Secrétariat d'Etat chargé de l'enfance et des familles, 2020<sup>[31]</sup>).

### ***Health approach***

Another approach to getting children the support they need is to target child health as an outcome to improve. **The health approach to the integrated policy plan for child well-being embraces a holistic framing of health.** It ultimately aims to ensure that child health is taken into account in a wide range of policy domains and that actions are developed in different settings, targeting for example the family or school. Among the whole sample of jurisdictions, only Austria takes this approach to the integrated plan for child well-being, inter-alia, with the open-ended "Child and Youth Health Strategy" adopted in 2011 by the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection.<sup>4</sup>

In many cases, such as in Austria, a cross-sectoral approach to child and adolescent health can be based on a broader perspective on child well-being. Better health outcomes are expected to come from addressing children and adolescent's needs and rights in a broad sense, while recognising that better health is also conducive to achieving better child outcomes in other areas.

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<sup>4</sup> In Austria, responsibility for general child and youth policies lies within the competence of the Federal Chancellery, and partly with the Federal Provinces (Bundesländer). The "Child and Youth Health Strategy" aims, in particular, to achieve a sustainable improvement in child and youth health based on a broadly conducted dialogue.

Austria's integrated plan is very comprehensive and thus the integrated plan's working group decided in 2016 to prioritise action areas to achieve a greater impact. The prioritised action areas are those that aren't covered by other health frameworks nor related to health care provision (Winkler, 2017<sup>[32]</sup>). The prioritised action areas are raising awareness of children and adolescent's particular health needs; laying the foundations for life-long health in pregnancy and early childhood; and strengthening children and adolescent's life skills to positively influence life-long health.

Austria's priority of raising awareness of children and adolescent's particular health needs concerns generating buy-in for the cross-policy responsibility for child and adolescent health and to get children and young people included as explicit targets in other national health-related policy plans. Actions in this priority area include using child impact assessments, integrating child- and youth-components into professional training, and making health treatment facilities more child friendly.

Austria's integrated plan also seeks to address the well-known social gradient to health, focusing on the various ways in which poor health status is transmitted from parent to child (Case, Lubotsky and Paxson, 2002<sup>[33]</sup>; Currie, Shields and Price, 2007<sup>[34]</sup>). Actions include promoting healthy nutrition at school and in the prenatal period, giving children opportunities to exercise, and strengthening parenting skills, including parental knowledge on risks to child and youth health, such as addictive behaviours, child safety and accident prevention, and child maltreatment. Austria very much seeks to build on the health promotion function of schools and ECEC while also seeking opportunities to support health promotion outside of school and in youth work settings.

### **Well-being approach**

**A more holistic approach to child well-being**, along lines of that of the OECD (2021<sup>[5]</sup>) child well-being measurement framework, **is present in five countries and five regions using the integrated plans to improve children's well-being** (Table 4). Common actions across the well-being integrated policy plans include being outcome-focused, an emphasis on child outcome measurement across well-being domains, and making links to wider national well-being initiatives.

**Table 4. Countries and regions taking a well-being approach to the integrated plan for child well-being**

Country/region	Integrated plan	Implementation timeframe	Lead entity
Vienna (Austria)	The Vienna Children and Youth Strategy 2020	5 years	Department of Education and Youth
Helsinki (Finland)	City of Helsinki, Finland- Welfare Plan for Children and Youth 2019-2021	4 years	Steering Group, Helsinki City Council
Ireland	Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people (2014-2020)	6 years	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
Italy	5th National Action Plan of Measures for the Protection of the Rights and Development of Subjects in Developmental Age 2022-23	2 years	Department of Family Policy
Japan	Outline for the Promotion of Development and Support for Children and Young People 2016	5 years	Centre of government
New Zealand	Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy	open ended	Child Well-being and Poverty Reduction Group, Centre of government
Northern Ireland (UK)	Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030,	10 years	Department of Education
Scotland (UK)	The Children, Young People and Families Outcomes Framework	open ended	Cross-government delivery board
Wales (UK)	The Children and Young People's Plan	5 years	Cross-government delivery board
United States	Pathways for Youth: Strategic Plan for Federal Collaboration	open ended	No lead

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.



Most well-being integrated policy plans engage with child rights – in some shape or form. However, child rights aren't necessarily part of their core and are more often understood as an important tool and contributor to the broader framework for improving children's lives (Box 6). New Zealand requires that any changes to the integrated plan respect and uphold child rights under national law as well as rights derived from the CRC and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Whereas Vienna (Austria), Ireland and Northern Ireland (UK) link the well-being outcomes they are seeking to achieve for children to the relevant articles of the CRC. Scotland (UK) and Wales's (UK) relationship between child rights and child well-being is more integral. Scotland (UK) identifies children's right being upheld as the foundation for child well-being, while Wales (UK) uses the CRC to inform the government's seven core aims for children and young people, which guide all aspects of the integrated plan's development and implementation (Box 7).

### Box 6. Child rights versus child well-being approaches: “cousins not twins”

Child rights and child well-being are often casually paired together but the two approaches differ conceptually, methodically and politically (Tisdall, 2015<sup>[30]</sup>). Child well-being is highly dependent on culture and other contextual factors, and therefore is subjective, whereas child rights are understood a particular period of development during which children should have certain rights to ensure optimal development (Sandin, 2014<sup>[35]</sup>). The child well-being approach benefits from being aspirational and maximising in its focus. It includes positive outcomes and can consider what assists as well as hinders children's well-being. It easily incorporates children's relationships and their collective needs. The child rights approach, on the other hand, emphasise minimum standards. The CRC sets minimum standards for child rights across ratifying countries, but it does allow countries to hold higher standards; indeed, some aspects of the CRC deal with the progressive realisation of rights and supporting children to reach their fullest potential. Child rights do not easily include all matters that are important to children, for example, feeling loved and secure, and their relationships. Nevertheless, child rights are politically powerful, backed by law and hold duty bearers to account. Whereas child well-being risks being utilitarian and overlooking children who fare the worst (Tisdall, 2015<sup>[30]</sup>).

Child rights and child well-being approaches to policy and practice benefit from different strengths and weaknesses. Child well-being has not established absolute or minimum standards, which leaves policy makers with more wiggle room to negotiate what matters for children's well-being and the subsequent priorities. Negotiating, however, always comes with the risk that standards will be adopted that serve children a raw deal. Child rights, in contrast, are inalienable, not open to revision, and there is no hierarchy. Yet child rights do not include all aspects of life that matter to children. There are also real difficulties in measuring the realisation of child rights. Measuring child rights goes beyond outcomes and requires measuring State Parties' activities as well as those of other duty bearers. The processes behind developing child rights indicators is just as critical as the choice of indicators themselves as children need to be meaningfully involved across all stages (Tisdall, 2015<sup>[30]</sup>).

Child rights and child well-being are not equivalent concepts. While certainly the two are related, how close this relationship actually is remains up for discussion. Rather than twins, they are more likely cousins (Lundy, 2014<sup>[36]</sup>). A child rights-based approach take on well-being sometimes sees well-being as the realisation of children's rights and the fulfilment of the opportunity for every child to be all they can be. Here, child rights can be measured in terms of positive outcomes while poor outcomes and deprivations indicate the denial of child rights. Child well-being approaches often refer to child rights (albeit to varying degrees), but rights are not part of its core nor are essential to its conceptualisation, measurement or delivery. Child well-being approaches see child rights as an important tool and as contributors to the broader framework for improving children's lives (Tisdall, 2015<sup>[30]</sup>).



### Box 7. Wales's seven core aims for children and young people

In 2004, the Welsh government set seven core aims for children and young people as the basis of all its work for children and young people. The seven core aims are guided by the CRC and makes efforts to support the CRC's implementation clearer to all actors. All actors should use the seven core aims to inform decisions on national priorities and objectives as well as to inform local strategy and service provision. They are:

1. Every child should have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development (CRC Articles 3, 6, 29, 36).
2. Every child and young person has access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including the acquisition of essential personal and social skills (CRC Articles 3, 13, 22, 28, 29, 30 and supported by entitlements 1, 2 and 5).
3. Enjoying the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation (CRC Articles 3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 19-25, 32-40 and supported by entitlements 6 and 7).
4. All children have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities (CRC Articles 15 and 31 and supported by entitlements 8 and 9).
5. All children and young people are listened to, treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised (CRC Articles 12-15, 21, 22, 30 and supported by entitlements 3 and 10).
6. All children and young people should have a safe home and community which supports physical and emotional well-being (CRC Articles 9, 11, 16, 23 and 33).
7. No child or young person is disadvantaged by poverty (UNCRC Articles 26 and 27).

Over the years, Wales has used the seven core aims to frame its approach to monitoring child and youth well-being in its main publication on child and youth well-being indicators. More recently, Wales has applied the seven core aims to the design of its integrated plan for child well-being, using them to set the focus areas, to make clear the government's ongoing commitments to children and young people's rights, and to determine what the government intends to do.

**The well-being integrated policy plans can offer an attractive antidote to policy short-termism as they provide a long-term approach to promoting child development and well-being.** The well-being integrated plans cover, on average, on a greater number of child policy domains than the other approaches as they focus on a set of interconnected outcomes and seek to make policy synergies. These integrated plans offer stakeholders a good taxonomy for talking about child well-being and how the various policy actions fit together. They also have the potential to offer governments a framework for systematically considering potential interactions, trade-offs and knock-on effects of intervening in different areas of children's lives.

**Using a well-being approach requires deliberative attention to not committing to too many actions and to having clear mechanisms to assist priority setting.** For instance, New Zealand has found early into its integrated plan's implementation the necessity to identify a small number of areas to focus on over the short term to reflect what the government sees as priority outcomes and what actions should be accorded importance. Stakeholders describe the integrated plan as "too broad" and "trying to do too much". The integrated plan's broad nature is attributed to a demanding development process, including the

requirements in the legislation, ministerial drivers, and the collaborative nature of the process. (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>). Ireland identified the need to refocus efforts on achieving a smaller number of changes, specifically those that would deliver significant benefits for children and young people. Ireland's broad framework gave all commitments the same weight and failed to drive a cross-government approach in the areas where it was most needed (Government of Ireland, 2019<sup>[38]</sup>).

The well-being integrated policy plans lay out a set of agreed well-being outcomes or goals for children. These outcomes are multidimensional, capturing different aspects of children's lives. They inform on how well children are doing, whether they have the support and resources they need, and if they are well set up for the future. Countries and regions typically choose well-being outcomes that capture positive outcomes and are at the same time aspirational, and therefore gear efforts towards maximising children's well-being. For instance, New Zealand has six interconnected outcomes for children and young people, which are broken down into a series of affirmative statements (DPMC, 2019<sup>[39]</sup>). The United States has seven common outcome domains, which set the basis for collaboration across federal agencies. These outcome domains focus on positive development and are connected to indicators measuring internal and external developmental assets (IWGYP, 2023<sup>[40]</sup>).

The well-being integrated policy plans are outcome-focused, which makes the job of mapping indicators to measure progress somewhat more straightforward. **Good quantitative evidence can provide a valuable indication of whether the integrated plan's actions are, on aggregate, moving child well-being in the right direction.** Some well-being integrated plans, for example, Ireland, New Zealand, and Scotland (UK) have thus come hand-in-hand with a measurement agenda to produce new evidence and data sources to provide more relevant information. However, not every well-being integrated plan has an indicator set nor an explicit plan around measuring outcomes, for example, Vienna (Austria).

**The child well-being integrated policy plans can be embedded into national well-being initiatives, which are often more advanced in terms of endorsement and integration into the policy cycle.** Wales's (UK) integrated plan contributes to some of the "nine national milestones" set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. Every year, Wales must measure and report how the measures contained in the integrated plan for child well-being contribute to reaching the nine national milestones. Here, the links between the national well-being plan and the child well-being integrated plan are made clear. To date, New Zealand's well-being budgeting has included a child well-being priority area connected to the integrated plan. While Scotland's integrated plan is very much an off shot of the National Performance Framework for achieving increased well-being and the 11 national outcomes. Though the National Performance Framework does contain child well-being indicators, the integrated plan for child well-being takes this work to the next level, on top of giving stakeholders direction on working together to promote child well-being (Box 8).

### Box 8. Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included (SHANNARRI): Scotland's eight child well-being indicators

Scotland's bases its common understanding of child well-being around the eight SHANNARRI well-being indicators. The SHANNARRI indicators consider children's wellbeing as rights-based, strengths-based, holistic and are adaptable enough to take into account the child or young person's stage of development and personal circumstances. This understanding of child well-being is in line with the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), Scotland's national approach to improving outcomes and supporting the well-being all children and young people.

The SHANNARRI indicators are interconnected and overlapping. They are:

- **Safe:** growing up in an environment where a child or young person feels secure, nurtured, listened to, and enabled to develop to their full potential. This includes freedom from abuse or neglect.
- **Healthy:** having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, access to suitable healthcare, and support in learning to make healthy and safe choices.
- **Achieving:** being supported and guided in learning and in the development of skills, confidence and self-esteem, at home, in school and in the community.
- **Nurtured:** growing, developing and being cared for in an environment which provides the physical and emotional security, compassion and warmth necessary for healthy growth and to develop resilience and a positive identity.
- **Active:** having opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport, which contribute to healthy growth and development, at home, in school and in the community.
- **Respected:** being involved in and having their voices heard in decisions that affect their life, with support where appropriate.
- **Responsible:** having opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles at home, in school and in the community, and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision.
- **Included:** having help to overcome inequalities and being accepted as part of their family, school and community.

Regard for the SHANNARRI indicators is legislated for in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Practitioners and organisations should consider each of the SHANNARRI indicators in collaboration, with children, young people and their family. This obligation translates into the use of the SHANNARRI indicators in service planning and day-to-day practice.

Scotland's new Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) Outcomes Framework has adopted eight overarching well-being outcomes, which have been developed from the SHANNARRI indicators and are underpinned by a set of shared aims of what everyone in Scotland needs to work towards to achieve improved wellbeing for children, young people and families. A core set of 21 child well-being indicators has been developed for the CYPF Outcomes Framework that covers key aspects of well-being and feeds into the eight well-being outcomes. Scotland intends to use this core child well-being indicator set in the annual reporting for the local Children's Services Plans and in national reporting on well-being. The next steps for Scotland in supporting the implementation of the CYPR Outcomes Framework and the core well-being indicator set includes mapping current datasets and indicators and establishing a well-being data network working group to coordinate action to fill data gaps.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

## Leadership of the child well-being policy agenda

**Leadership of the child well-being policy agenda across the OECD typically rests with a single government ministry or agency.** Most countries and regions have a ministry or agency with a social or health portfolio leading the implementation of the integrated policy plan for child well-being. Less frequently, leadership rests with an inter-ministerial committee or working group, or directly with the centre of government. No obvious differences exist in leadership arrangements across the different policy approaches of the integrated plans (Table 5).

**Table 5. Coordination leads for the integrated plan for child well-being**

Country/ region	Led by ministry or government agency	Led by Centre of Government or other mechanism
Australia	Department of Social Services	
Austria	Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection	
Austria (Vienna)	Department of Education and Youth	
Belgium (Wallonia)	Ministry of Children, Culture, the Media and Women's Rights	
Canada (British Columbia)	Ministry of Children & Family Development	
Chile	Ministry of Social Development	
Colombia		Presidential Advisory Office for Children and Adolescents
Costa Rica	State children agency	
Czech Republic	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	
Estonia	Ministry of Social Affairs	
France	Ministry of Solidarity & Health	
Finland	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (from 2023)	Prime Minister's Office
Finland (Helsinki)		Special steering group
Greece		National Mechanism for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Action Plan on the Rights of the Child
Iceland	Ministry of Education and Children	The Government Offices Steering Committee on Children's Affairs
Italy	Department of Family Policy	
Ireland	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs	
Japan		The Council for the Promotion of Child-related Policies
Korea	Ministry of Health and Welfare	
Latvia	Ministry of Welfare	
Lithuania	Ministry of Social Security and Labour	
Luxembourg	Ministry of National Education, Children & Youth	
New Zealand		Child Well-being and Poverty Reduction Group, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
Portugal	Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Young People, Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security	
Slovenia		Council for Children and Families
Spain	Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030	
Spain (Valencia)		Interdepartmental Commission for Children and Adolescents
Sweden		Child Rights Unit, Centre of government

Country/ region	Led by ministry or government agency	Led by Centre of Government or other mechanism
United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)	Department of Education	
United Kingdom (Scotland)		Cross-government delivery board
United Kingdom (Wales)		Cross-government delivery board
United States	(i) Administration of Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services	(ii) The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs

Note: Details on Japan refer to leadership arrangement for its successor integrated plan that will be formulated in 2023.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

Leading the child well-being policy agenda from social affairs or health ministries is an obvious choice as these ministries often carry a greater bulk of the responsibilities for the policy areas bearing a direct impact on children's lives; to make these governance arrangements fully effective it's important that **mandated ministries have both leverage and enough capacity to deliver on complex agendas entailed by child well-being integrated plans**. Delivering on the child well-being agenda involves action from policy areas outside of the lead ministry, including policy areas that may have an indirect impact on children and their interests. Child well-being requires coordinated action across many (if not most) parts of government, and thus social and health ministries can find themselves underpowered to deliver. For example, Ireland's integrated plan is led by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs, which is the country's smallest government department. The department's small size and influence contributed to difficulties in securing the necessary political commitment to drive implementation during the integrated plan's lifetime. The final implementation report for the integrated plan stressed the need for strengthening government leadership from Prime Minister's office to act as a key driver of implementation (DCEDIY, 2022<sup>[41]</sup>).

**To drive implementation, countries and region should look at ways to reinforce the influence of the lead ministry for the integrated policy plan for child well-being and the child well-being policy agenda more broadly.** One option is to have a unit within the centre of government promoting cross-government work and long-term implementation. Finland took the decision to establish a Child Strategy Group in the office of the Prime Minister whose job was to promote interagency cooperation and coordination and to ensure the continuity of the integrated plan's work. The creation of this Group was a follow-on from the strong cross-government approach to developing the integrated plan, which was led by a parliamentary committee with secretariat support from the Prime Minister's office and Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture and representatives from civil society organisations. Finland relocated the Group at the beginning of the new term of government to the Child and Youth Unit in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The move also coincided with the end of the first stage of implementation. The Group's function has not changed. Its tasks will remain cross-administrative, for example, promoting child impact assessments and child-specific budgeting. The integrated plan has earned good recognition as the primary document for cross-government work on child well-being, which the Group intends to continue to leverage to engage line ministries.

Another option for facilitating cross-government work and the integration process is to give oversight for the integrated plan for child well-being to an inter-ministerial committee or a committee that also includes experts and civil society. Around half of countries and regions take this approach, with the role played often being strategic (Box 9). For example, Chile requires the Inter-ministerial Committee for Social Development and Family to approve the integrated plan's implementation plan for the integrated plan. This committee comprises of the highest political authorities that hold portfolios related to child and adolescent

issues. Chile describes this approval process as very effective for ensuring that government ministries and agencies have shared objectives for child well-being.

### Box 9. Selected coordination mechanisms for the integrated plans

**Korea** established an inter-ministerial committee, the Child Policy Coordination Committee, to oversee its second integrated plan for child well-being. This Committee is responsible for all matters concerning the establishment of the integrated plan, the basic direction for the promotion of children's interests, rights, and welfare, improvement of child policy and budget support, and cooperation between relevant ministries regarding child policy. The Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of civil servants of the relevant ministries.

**Iceland** established under law in 2019 the Government Offices Steering Committee on Children's Affairs to promote co-operation and coordination between ministries on child well-being and to formulate Iceland's policy. This Committee is chaired by the lead child ministry (Ministry of Education and Children) and is comprised of representatives from ministries that have signed a memorandum of understanding to increase cooperation between policy areas under their remit that are relevant for promoting child well-being. In addition, it includes a representative of the Prime Minister's Office and an observer from the Federation of Local Authorities. The committee carries out its function in cooperation with the Government's Steering Committee on Human Rights. It also receives advice from a special representative council of child-related institutions, associations and other community members, which provide a means for children consultation. The Committee will assist public bodies to carry out child impact assessments and work with them to ensure the active, significant, and responsible participation of children more broadly. The Committee is also responsible for the action plan for Children's Prosperity Act, which will improve integration and access to child services.

**Italy** co-develops its integrated plan for child well-being with the National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence, a cross-government and civil society, which is headed by either the President of the Council of Minister or the Minister for Family Policy. The National Observatory collegial body and was established in 1997. Its members remain in office for 3 years, and include civil society and the third sector representatives, ministries, representatives of regions and local public administrations, private entities, experts, universities, and research bodies. Italy finds that the National Observatory's collegial nature makes it easier for policymakers and public officials to identify potential contrasting policies or interventions.

**Portugal** created three coordination mechanism to assist the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Young People to implement the integrated plan. First, is the inter-ministerial commission, which is composed of a representative of each area of government and chaired by the Minister for Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. The inter-ministerial commission must ensure that National Commission deliver the implementation plans on time. It also approves the implementation plans, ensuring that the strategic and operational objectives defined in the integrated plan are covered. Second, is the technical monitoring and follow-up committee, which promotes and monitors the implementation of the integrated plan and mobilises all stakeholders. It provides a lot of practical support to the National Commission. Third, is the Advisory Committee, which provides technical and scientific advice, issued through offering expert opinions and recommendations on the request of the technical monitoring and follow-up committee.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

Because child well-being is a cross-cutting policy agenda, some countries have taken the decision to lead from the centre of government within the support structure serving the highest level of executive branch of government. In general, countries lead policy initiatives from the centre of government if they are very complex, or if there is a need for expert coordination between ministries, and/or the area has become a priority for the head of government. **The centre of government can be a good broker and facilitator of collective outcomes and of getting ministries to undertake work that goes beyond their typical mandate.** The centre of government can have the convening power, which line ministries often lack but need (OECD, 2018<sup>[42]</sup>). In relation to youth policy, the OECD Youth Governance Surveys found that none of the countries where the centre of government assumes responsibility for the youth portfolio identified the lack of political will/leadership as a challenge for co-ordination (OECD, 2020<sup>[12]</sup>). Being housed in the centre of government also signals the importance of the policy initiative and ensures that issues are considered from a whole-of-government perspective and not confined to a limited policy domain (OECD, 2018<sup>[42]</sup>).

New Zealand's integrated plan for child well-being is led by the Child Well-being and Poverty Reduction Group in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The lead minister of this Group was up until recently the country's Prime Minister in her capacity as the Minister for Child Poverty Reduction. The Child Well-being and Poverty Reduction Group has a leadership role and advises, monitors, champions, and acts as a steward for the integrated plan for children and the Child Poverty Reduction Act. New Zealand describes the role played by this Group as valuable. For instance, this Group has stepped in to guide stakeholders in identifying priority areas and to take action, including establishing working groups for key initiatives, such as the First One Thousand Days and Debt to Government. Nevertheless, an early process evaluation of the New Zealand's integrated plan found that some stakeholders still think this Group needs to take a more active role in supporting further prioritisation of the integrated plan's work and in brokering partnerships between government and non-governmental organisations (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>).

**The centre of government can be better at getting policy initiatives off the ground than driving long-term agendas.** When issues require ongoing attention, as child well-being certainly does, they are typically rehoused to line ministries. Once rehoused, these policy initiatives tend to become less of a priority for the government (OECD, 2018<sup>[42]</sup>). Australia had the experience of moving leadership for its integrated plan for child well-being from the centre of the federal government to the state departments for child protection. Australia had a standing Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) committee accountable for its first integrated plan for children but halfway through, following COAG restructuring, transferred governance arrangements to the Children and Families Secretaries (CAFS). The CAFS consist of the chief executives from the state child protection departments across Australia. The original accountability arrangement was intended to support a whole-of-government response across the country's jurisdictions to address the drivers of child maltreatment and engage multiple policy portfolios and various non-governmental actors. Some stakeholders think that reporting to COAG provided a greater authorising environment. For example, COAG leadership led to the establishment of some high-profile initiatives, such as the National Children's Commissioner and National Standards for Out-of-Home Care. The CAFS found themselves unable to influence the broader government priorities to the same extent as the COAG committee had. The make-up of the CAFS led to the narrowing of focus of activities and discussions around the integrated plan to those of child protection at the expense of system-wide reforms. Some stakeholders think the integrated plan became less of a priority to the government as a direct result. For instance, current COAG performance reporting contains no indicators relating to child safety or well-being. (PwC, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>).



# 2

## Using child-specific tools to inform policy and budgetary decisions

This section discusses the use of child-specific tools across the OECD to inform and implement the integrated policy plans, namely child impact assessments, child-specific budgeting and child well-being indicator sets. These tools can be considered as general measures of implementation (GMI) of the CRC. The use of these tools varies across the OECD, with countries either using them to aid the implementation of their integrated plan for child well-being or more broadly to inform policy and budgetary decisions. Though these tools are referred to across the integrated policy plans, the plans underpinned by a child-rights or well-being approach appear to emphasise their systematic use or intention to build the relevant competencies and methodologies to a greater extent.

### Child impact assessments

**Child impact assessments (CIAs)** are expected to enable government ministries or agencies to **identify, analyse and assess the potential impacts or benefits of any proposed law or policy on the rights and well-being of children and adolescents**. CIAs are understood as a means of mainstreaming international child rights principles and standards into domestic laws, policies, and processes. However, the CRC does not put an expressed duty on countries to undertake CIAs, with the actual practice of CIAs often stemming from a domestic legal obligation to assess the potential impact of policies and laws on children.

There is not much evidence to suggest that CIAs are conducted to a great extent across OECD countries, be that at the national, sub-national or local level (Hoffman, 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). The limited numbers of examples of CIA provided by countries and regions to the Questionnaire suggests the same. **Only 16 countries and three regions have some type of obligation to document the anticipated impacts of new laws and policies on children, however this obligation is not always binding.**

**Countries and regions take different approaches to CIAs, reflecting their specific policy context and priorities, and experiences of conducting CIAs and social impact assessments** (Box 10). Wales (UK) has the richest set of CIA undertaken so far. In Wales, CIAs help government ministers know whether they are giving due regard to the CRC when exercising their functions as required under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measures 2011. CIAs are undertaken as part of a wider integrated impact assessment that must be completed on proposed strategies and policies on equality and diversity issues, sustainable development, the Welsh language and health and wellbeing (including child poverty). Anyone can make a complaint to the government if a CIA has not been completed when they believe it should have been. An evaluation of the Welsh model in 2016 underlined the need to reduce the number of stages to streamline the process and to strengthen requirements to identify and refer to an evidence base, including child consultations (Hoffman, 2015<sup>[44]</sup>).



### Box 10. Approaches to child impact assessments in the OECD

Several OECD countries and regions have some type of child impact assessment (CIA) tool. There is no single, global model of CIA because countries and regions develop their own tools to suit the policy context and priorities and to leverage their experience of conducting CIA and wider human rights impact assessments. CIA use the CRC and its Optional Protocols as one of its guiding frameworks to determine what effect a policy proposal might have on the country's progress in realising child rights and/or whether child rights would be breached.

Fifteen countries and two regions report a national (or regional) child impact assessment tool or set criteria to base assessments upon. New Zealand, for example, has the Child Impact Assessment Tool, for government and non-governmental organisations to use. This tool assesses whether policy proposals will improve the well-being of children and young people, guiding officials to consider the CRC general principles of the child's best interests and of respect and giving due weight to children's views. It comprises of a guidance document, a screening sheet, and a three-step (full) child impact assessment. The government provides only the most crucial guidance because each agency or individual will bring proposal-specific context and information to every CIA assessment. The screening sheet analysis may be sufficed if the proposal will not have a distinct or significant impact on children and young people. CIA are part of the government cabinet-agreed cross-agency work programme to progressively implement the CRC. Recent Cabinet papers from a range of agencies have included CIA.

Federal states and devolved governments can have their own separate CIA tools, for example, in Australia and Canada, and the devolved UK nations of Scotland and Wales, and Valencia (Spain). Scotland has the Child Rights and Well-being Assessment tool and has legislation requiring its use on any proposed law, policy or measure related to child well-being, and not just those with a direct impact. Use of the tool is also tied to grant allocations to civil society to evidence that they have considered children's rights and well-being in the creation of their policies and procedures (The Scottish Government, 2021<sup>[45]</sup>). This CIA tool follows the usual procedure of a regulatory impact assessment, adding considerations around CRC compliance, and the advancement of children's rights, as well as the potential impact against the eight well-being indicators in *Getting it Right for Every Child*, the national approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. The initial stage is a screening exercise, which determines whether a full assessment is warranted or not, with a public record required of this decision. Child Rights and Well-being Assessments also inform reporting to the Scottish parliament every three years on progress on the implementation of the CRC.

Instead of using a standalone CIA, some countries and regions use integrated impact assessment tools to consider concurrently the impact of policies on children and other vulnerable groups. Integrated impact assessment tools may not take an explicit child rights or well-being focus. They consider the distributional effects of policies on different groups, with children being regarded on virtue of age or by family type. Examples of integrated impact assessments models are the Equality Impact Assessment in Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), Gender Budgeting Assessment Plus (Canada), Poverty Impact Assessment in Ireland, and Social Impact Assessments in Slovak Republic. Slovak Republic's Social Impact Assessments requires every ministry to identify and quantify the financial impact on households (both income and expenditure) and the impact on social inclusion and social equality (vulnerable groups, access to goods and services, equal opportunities, employment, regional differences etc.) of their proposed policies. A child-specific tool might be preferable because integrated tools risk only considering broad and very visible direct impacts on children. This more superficial approach can render a disservice to vulnerable groups of children and to lesser considered needs and rights (Desmet and Op De Beeck, 2014<sup>[46]</sup>). To this end, Canada's Department of Justice is working on an optional CIA tool

to assist federal departments to assess the potential impact of proposed initiatives on children. Similarly, the country's Youth Secretariat has developed an optional Youth Impact Analysis Tool.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

Though CIAs are a good tool for introducing children's perspectives into policy making, **ensuring that children are meaningfully involved in CIA-related processes requires concerted efforts.** An examination of practices of CIAs across a number of countries found that securing the participation of children is likely to be one of the most challenging aspects of the whole process (Hoffman, 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). Children need to be provided with age-appropriate material and new and innovative methods are needed to support consultation and participation. Policy makers are often under pressure to turn around a CIA quickly, which runs counter to the resources and processes required for meaningful child participation.

Promoting the systematic use of CIAs is set as a priority in a couple of the integrated plans for child well-being, for example, Austria, Finland, Iceland, Korea and New Zealand. The rationale behind the systematic use of CIAs is to make children's issues more visible within the workings of government and to introduce a more strategic process of policy development affecting children (Payne, 2019<sup>[47]</sup>). Finland sets out the premise in its integrated plan for the systematic use of CIAs for all decision making, especially at the municipal level, and for justifying action plans. Korea set the goal of conducting 30 CIAs on major child policies within the lifetime of its current integrated plan (i.e., 2020-24). To support this goal, Korea has developed manuals and guidelines for conducting child impact assessments and has outlined two main approaches. The first is when an in-depth evaluation is required, and in this case, a specialised institution provides input. The second is when expert inputs are not needed. Civil servants evaluate any potential impact using a standardised form that provides a checklist of questions that need to be considered.

Producing **high-quality and meaningful CIAs is resource intensive and depends a lot on the known ingredients of good child policy making**, such as good cross-government and cross-sectoral coordination, greater awareness and understanding of child rights, and data that can be disaggregated to identify disparities in outcome for different groups of children. Extra funding may also be needed for inputs from experts. To move beyond superficial CIAs, civil servants need adequate training on child rights to allow them to identify relevant impacts and fully analyse mitigating measures and alternatives. Cross-agency champions groups comprising of civil servants that have experience of conducting CIAs can be helpful to embed good practice.

**Countries need to be strategic in their decisions around conducting CIAs.** The broader the scope of CIA and the range of instruments that it is applied to, the higher the risk that CIAs will be undertaken in a superficial manner or lighter form, given the demands that will be placed on civil servants. Flanders (Belgium) only obligates CIAs for legislative proposals initiated by members of Parliament and not to regulatory decisions. This limits the workload for civil servants but dilutes the potential impact of CIAs as regulation often has a greater and more direct impact on children and young people. Nonetheless, Flemish civil servants see this decision as a good compromise (Desmet and Op De Beeck, 2014<sup>[46]</sup>).

## Child data and child well-being indicator sets

Child well-being indicator sets are an important tool for helping governments develop more co-ordinated and coherent policy approaches (Durand and Exton, 2019<sup>[48]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>). They can serve as organising frameworks for policy development by providing policy makers and key stakeholders with a more complete picture of children's lives and where the key challenges may lie. Child well-being indicator sets also help to raise awareness of child issues and contribute to a shared understanding of child well-being. They can provide governments with the needed knowledge base on child well-being to establish

coherent goals and policy priorities, which in turn helps support strategic alignment and co-operation across departments and agencies (Exton and Shinwell, 2018<sup>[49]</sup>).

**Different child well-being measures and indicators are suitable for informing different stages of the policy cycle.** For example, child well-being indicators can assist agenda setting and policy formulation by identifying challenges to children’s well-being emerging from the data. Indicators developed for priority setting purposes provide an ex-ante assessment of children’s situation as they help to identify unmet needs, the nature of problems facing, and which groups of children are most vulnerable or exposed to certain types of risks or deprivations.

Child well-being indicator sets can be used for **monitoring and reporting progress on policy implementation**. In this case, indicator sets can contribute to an ex-post evaluation of the consequences of policies. This can be operated at a macro level by looking, for example, at whether inequalities in children’s well-being or their risk of being exposed to particular problems change after a policy has been implemented. However, because indicators need to capture the effect of policies, the development of indicators on child outcomes for such a purpose may be challenging. High level indicators based on global population data often don’t make it possible to capture policy impacts as the data they are based on don’t necessarily include a good sample of the groups impacted by policies (Box 11). Monitoring the progress of policies also requires measuring the gradual implementation of policies through indicators that, for example, measure the allocation and effective use of policy-dedicated budgets, or that measure whether policies are reaching their targets (e.g., by measuring the proportion of children who have benefited from specific supports) before measuring their impact on child outcomes. Data timeliness is also crucial, particularly after a policy reform or to identify the challenges caused by an exceptional event or changing economic conditions on the living conditions of children and their families.

### Box 11. Cross-national child data: What are the biggest data gaps?

The OECD review of cross-national child data landscape found that some areas of children’s lives are better measured than others (OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>). On one hand, comparable cross-national data is relatively widely available on child cognitive development and learnings outcomes— especially with respect to the traditional core areas of reading, maths and science – as is information on adolescent health and physical well-being. While on the other, child social and emotional well-being is less well covered, partly due to the lack of a consistent conceptual and statistical framework. Comparable information on child material living standards is also relatively scarce, especially for many OECD countries outside Europe. There is also a general lack of comparable cross-national data on children’s well-being during early childhood.

The coverage of the most marginalised children in the existing cross-national child data is poor. Frequently, it is not easy or not at all possible to identify within the data children with disabilities, children experiencing maltreatment, and children in out-of-home care and other vulnerable positions. Sometimes, these children are missing entirely. Similarly, cross-national data does not always reflect children’s views and perspectives. For example, there is limited cross-national information available on adolescents’ views on several important areas, including their own material and social and emotional well-being. There also is a lack of data on children and adolescents’ “social capital”, including on perceptions and confidence in their social and cultural identities, their participation in group activities, their trust in institutions, and their knowledge of global and societal issues.

Existing cross-national child data are not well suited to the inter-connected nature of child well-being. Cross-national child data, to the extent that they are available, typically come from a range of separate and disconnected surveys and datasets, each with their own particular focus. While understandable



**Table 6. Selected national child data initiatives and indicator sets**

Country	Child data activity	Responsible Entity	Dimensions covered	Disaggregation
Estonia	Indicator set on children and young people's rights	The Chancellor of Justice (Ombudsman for Children)	Aspects of well-being and child rights	by gender
Ireland	State of the Nation's Children/ National Set of Child Well-being Indicators	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth Affairs	6 areas, including child outcomes, relationships and supports	by gender, family background, and disability/and or chronic illness status
Slovenia	Child Well-being Index	Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia	7 areas covering outcomes, behaviours and risks, and environment and settings	by gender
Spain	Childhood in Data Portal	Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030	6 areas of children's lives and children in vulnerable positions	by gender
Türkiye	A Snapshot on Statistics of Children in Türkiye	Turkish Statistical Institute	8, including health, education, and material well-being	by gender
United Kingdom	Children's Well-being Measures	United Kingdom Office for National Statistics	7, personal well-being, relationships, education and skills, and neighborhood	by gender
United States (Virginia)	Measuring Success for Children and Youth	Fairfax Virginia Country Government	8 outcome areas covering health, education, violence and injury prevention and contribution to community	by gender and by age

Note: Selected examples provided to the Questionnaire.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

**Fewer countries and regions again have a child well-being indicator set linked to monitoring the integrated policy plan for child well-being.** Seven countries and regions, Australia, Helsinki (Finland), Ireland, New Zealand, Valencia (Spain), Scotland (UK), and the United States have indicator sets covering child outcomes (Table 7). Colombia has an indicator set attached to its integrated plan for early childhood that provides administrative data on access to services, while Iceland's indicator set provides information to help the government and municipalities to prioritise projects, make funding decisions and to develop policies. Austria uses headline indicators to monitor progress on achieving the integrated plan's goals. Some indicators monitor trends in health behaviours and improving services. Chile has an indicator set focusing on child rights and framed around the four axes of child rights (i.e., survival, development, protection, and participation). Chile has yet to identify any indicators under the participation axis, reflecting the real difficulties that exist in measuring this right in particular. Finland (Box 12) and Northern Ireland (UK) are in the process of developing their indicator sets for monitoring the integrated plan.

Chile also has a comprehensive dashboard for monitoring the implementation of the integrated plan. This dashboard provides information on every action, milestones reached, funding, the responsible entity and whether the action includes child participation and if the child's best interest principle is being upheld. Chile finds the constant need to keep this dashboard up to date challenging. Chile has an IT platform to facilitate institutions to do reporting; however, getting this platform up and running and user-friendly has proven challenging as institutions struggle to provide information that is compatible with the indicators belonging to the integrated plan (Undersecretariat for Childhood, 2021<sup>[50]</sup>).

Other approaches are taken to selecting indicators to monitor the integrated plan. For example, Wales (UK) uses the small number of the child-related indicators from its national well-being indicators set for monitoring. A small number of countries and regions, for example, British Columbia (Canada), Costa Rica, Korea, and Luxembourg have indicated in the integrated plan which indicators they will use for monitoring, sometimes relating to implementation. For example, Luxembourg includes qualitative indicators to capture

desired outputs relating to every goal, while British Columbia sets a small number of yearly targets to inform on improvements to child and youth outcomes and access to supports and services, for example, percentage of young care leavers with a high school credentials and number of children and young people able to access child and adolescent mental health services.

**Table 7. Selected data activities linked to monitoring integrated plans for child well-being**

Country	Child data activity	Responsible Entity	Linked Policy plan	Dimensions covered	Indicators
Australia	Child Protection Australia indicator set Closing the Gap dashboard	Australian Institute of Health & Welfare	Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031	Child protection system data	
Chile	Growing with Rights	Ministry of Social Development	National Policy on Children and Adolescents 2015-2025	4 axes of child rights	46
Helsinki (Finland)	The Well-being of Children and Young People in Helsinki database and dashboard		City of Helsinki, Finland-Welfare Plan for Children and Youth	6	100+ 16 headline indicators
Ireland	Better Outcomes Bright Future Indicator Set	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth Affairs	Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people (2014-2020)	5 national outcomes	100 +
New Zealand	Child and Youth Wellbeing Indicators	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy	6 national outcomes	36
Scotland (UK)	Core well-being indicator set		The Children, Young People and Families Outcomes Framework		21
United States	Common Outcomes Framework to Advance Positive Youth Development		Pathways for Youth: Strategic Plan for Federal Collaboration	7	
Valencia (Spain)	Childhood in Data Portal	Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030	The Valencian Strategy for Children and Adolescents 2022-2026	6 areas of children's lives and children in vulnerable positions	100+

Source: OECD 2022 Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

### Box 12. Finland's National Child Strategy and child data: the journey so far

Under the country's National Child Strategy, Finland has tasked Statistics Finland with producing a comprehensive knowledge base for monitoring the well-being of children and young people to support decision-making in accordance with the objectives of the Strategy. Statistic Finland has completed the first step of this work, arriving at six proposals to support the development of a single child database and an indicator dashboard.

Statistics Finland started off this work by collecting all indicators on child well-being produced in the country and then creating a data framework to categorise these indicators. Statistic Finland collected only nationally produced indicators with time series and omitted those that don't directly measure child well-being (for e.g., costs of services) and one-time-only indicators that have been discontinued. In total, 2 400 indicators were collected, 850 of which are produced by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 800 by Statistics Finland, and 200 by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland. Most data are collected through surveys. From this, Statistic Finland mapped information gaps and found poorer data



coverage of children's hobbies and leisure time, especially for young children, and their social connections, as well of children with disabilities or with a migrant background.

Statistics Finland has established that there is a huge amount of data on children in Finland, but they are dispersed across different places, which leads to weak joining up of data. There is a great number of data producers but since data production is not coordinated, there are gaps and overlaps and limited collaboration. Overall, Finland has a lot of untapped information on children collected in health and social care settings. Moreover, at the regional level, data needs are not always met and there is a lack of follow-up indicators. Statistic Finland has made the six following proposals:

1. Production of child data should be supported by a coordinator and a cooperation group.
2. Cooperation in survey data production should be investigated.
3. The possibilities of and restriction against using untapped data should be investigated.
4. For register data, the key indicators for regional use should be selected in cooperation with data users and common practices agreed upon.
5. All data should be gathered in the same child database to create a common data source.
6. A child data portal could be built using this child database as well as a dashboard of a more limited set of key indicators.

Source: Lahtela and Pärnänen (2023<sup>[51]</sup>), Statistics Finland.

A small subset of countries and regions, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland (UK) and the United States, connect their indicator sets to an outcomes framework that motivates the choice of indicators to measure changes on specific aspects of each outcome. This helps to identify more easily areas of children's lives where action is needed. While Ireland, New Zealand, and Scotland (UK) have developed core indicators set, the United States has not and instead identifies common indicators for measuring each outcome.

**Though there is no ideal size for an indicator set, smaller indicator sets can be easier to integrate into priority setting and policy formulation.** The advantage of smaller indicator sets is that they facilitate discussions on limited issues that are clearly identified through the lens of the incorporated indicators. Having the same indicators used by different governmental bodies can align policy discussions further and make sure that the selected indicators are fully aligned with policy strategic commitments. For instance, New Zealand and Scotland (UK) have made efforts to align indicators where possible with other government indicator sets and measurement frameworks. However, **only selecting a small number of indicators can be arbitrary and risks giving a biased or partial impression of children's situation.** Some countries prefer to instead develop large indicator sets to capture a wide range of facets of children's lives, such as Ireland where the indicator set has a hundred plus indicators. Larger sets of indicators are particularly useful for identifying key challenges and responding to them by adjusting policies or taking new initiatives. However, it is not always clear how a broad set of indicators is used to inform policy.

New Zealand's annual progress report draws on a set of 36 indicators to monitor child well in the key dimensions that are at the core of its integrated plan's vision. Not all data are available annually (DPMC, 2022<sup>[52]</sup>). These indicators are also mapped against actions that are being taken to improve the well-being of particular groups of children in these areas, but without directly measuring policy impact. This information is certainly useful in determining what changes to the programme of action are needed to achieve the long-term goals but is not sufficient to really assess whether the measures adopted are actually being implemented, effectively reaching the children who need them most, or having the intended effect on children's outcomes.

New Zealand has legislation requiring the government to set out in the integrated plan how the six high-level and interconnected outcomes for children and young people will be measured. This legislation specifies



analysing disparities of outcomes for children living in poverty and experiencing wider socio-economic disadvantage as well as providing a specific analysis of outcomes for Māori children. Doing so, requires ongoing investment to keep data up-to-date and to fill data gap; or otherwise, the needs of these children will not be visible.

## Child-specific budgeting approaches

Some governments pursue **child-specific budgeting to help determine whether policies and programmes for children are sufficiently funded**, as part of global efforts to promote child well-being. Child-specific budgeting can offer a methodology to governments to identify and break down what they allocate to and spend on child well-being policies and programmes, to track spending over time, and to assess the impact of spending on child well-being and realising child rights. However, **it can be challenging to move child-specific budgeting practices beyond identifying spending on children to aligning spending with policy priorities and impacts.**

**Child-specific budgeting does not yet offer a way to compare spending on children across countries** because only a handful of OECD countries have experience of child-specific budgeting. Experiences range from efforts to identify (most) public expenditure on children to making it explicit budget allocations to aspects of child well-being or child rights (Box 13). No OECD country seems to evaluate ex-post the impact of implemented budgets on child well-being. Despite the absence of strong child-specific budgeting practices, there is interest in child-specific budgeting, with Vienna (Austria), Wallonia (Belgium), Helsinki (Finland), Iceland and Scotland (UK) intending to develop child-specific budgeting methodologies.

### Box 13. OECD countries' experiences of developing child-specific budgeting

**Chile** started child-specific budgeting in 2019 to identify, review and measure the national budget's investments and spending on children and adolescents, with the practice becoming law in 2023. The Undersecretariat of Children is responsible for the process but receives assistance from the Ministry of Finance. Efforts to improve the methodology are still ongoing.

Chile's child-specific budgeting estimates four outgoings: expenditure on child and adolescent programmes; institutional investments made by public agencies whose target population are children and adolescents; resources the health sector allocates to children and adolescents that do not correspond to the programmatic supply; and resources allocated to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic that benefited children, adolescents and their families. Expenditure is classified as direct, indirect or expanded (Mansilla and Azocar, 2022<sup>[53]</sup>). The Undersecretariat for Children must present the child budgeting results to the parliament at the same time as the national budget is being presented.

**Costa Rica** undertakes child-specific budgeting to help inform decision-making regarding resource allocations aimed at children and adolescent from the perspective of gender, social and territorial equity. Costa Rica does not look at total public spending, but rather public spending channelled through selected institutions that can provide information under a programmatic structure to identify more clearly on which activities funding gets spent. Costa Rica produces indicators on spending by gender, age-group, and area of child rights, as well as total public spending on children as a share of GDP. To date, Costa Rica has had issues with data quality on spending and beneficiaries, which limits the precision of the estimates and thus applying results to improve the quality of relevant spending (UNICEF, 2022<sup>[54]</sup>).

**Finland** has recently recommended municipalities and well-being service counties to conduct joint child-specific budgeting, which incorporate a child impact assessment, to evaluate whether resources

are sufficient in relation to children's needs and whether funds are allocated to measures that reduce the need for more expensive services later. Finland proposes that the Ministry of Finance coordinates the development of this child-specific budgeting, in cooperation with the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

The proposed child-specific budgeting model relies on the current service classification financial reporting system that municipalities and well-being service counties to produces outturn data. To avoid the formation of a new reporting obligation, the appropriations allocated by municipalities and wellbeing services counties to children and families with children will be classified according to the service classification and financial reporting system. The proposed model uses child well-being indicators, which are part of a traffic light classification: green indicators relate to universal preventive services; yellow indicators to services providing temporary support; and red to protective or for corrective services, for e.g., number of children and young people placed in out-of-home care.

Finland will take a staggered approach to implementing child-specific budgeting, based on pilots. In the first stage, municipalities and wellbeing services counties need to compile a joint "financial statement" of the wellbeing of children, young people and families. Moreover, to inform more effective allocation of spending to realise child's rights, every child-specific budgeting report must also contain an analysis of the benefits and disadvantages of the selected budgetary measures on children and young people (Aho and Penttilä, 2022<sup>[55]</sup>).

**Mexico** has a long tradition of child-specific budgeting going back to 2013. Mexico requires by legislation for every federal ministry to submit a report on public spending on children and adolescents during the budget framework process. The country considers public spending to have an impact on children and adolescents, if it meets any of following three conditions: (i) its objectives directly promote children's rights; (ii) it was determined or designed with child well-being in mind; or (iii) is aimed at strengthening an agent promoting children's rights (e.g., parent or professionals working in children's services or education etc.).

Mexico categorises public spending according to the four axis of child rights i.e., survival, development, protection and participation. Within this categorisation, Mexico breaks down public spending to identify direct expenditure, agentic expenditure, expenditure on vulnerable population groups in which children represent a significant share, and expenditure on public goods that are least partially designed to meet the specific needs of children. All indirect expenditure is broken down again to identify which parts benefit children using a weighting reflecting children or their agents' share of the target population. Mexico produces indicators on spending on children, including spending on children as a share of GDP, as a share of total spending and spending per child (Garcimartín et al., 2018<sup>[56]</sup>).

**Spain** has been implementing child-specific budgeting since 2021 through a yearly report examining the impact of the general state budget on the well-being of children, adolescents and families, on child rights, and on how this spending relates to the SDGs. Child-specific budgeting sits beside other initiatives looking at the impact of the general state budget on achieving policy priorities, for example, gender equality and the green transition. Spain measures the percentage of programme expenditure benefitting children, adolescents and families, collectively and individually, and identifies the number of programmes contributing at the aggregate level to the well-being of these three groups and to child rights.

Spain's child-specific budgeting considers only spending with a direct or indirect impact on children and families. Programmes with an indirect impact are those that don't contain objectives for children but have a positive impact on children. It is up to each ministry to decide whether a programme has an impact or not, with programmes with no perceived impact not reported. For the 2023 Budget bill, Spain assessed the impact of 109 programme proposals by 19 ministries, crossing 21 budget lines. Twenty-five of these programmes are funded under Spain's strategic investment plan, Plan de Recuperación,

Transformación y Resiliencia. Spain found that a significant share of spending on children and adolescents (44%) is through programmes that don't target children directly. The ministries with the highest number of programmes are those whose programmes mostly target children directly, while the budget lines with the highest number of programmes were Culture (20 programmes) and Social Services and Social Promotion (20 programmes). The highest share of programmes contribute to child rights relating to the family and to child well-being connected to family and the social environment (Government of Spain, 2022<sup>[57]</sup>).

Source: OECD 2022 Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

Because child-specific budgeting is a general measure of implementation of the CRC, countries face pressure to develop child-specific budgeting to demonstrate that they are making every effort to mobilise, allocate and spend budgetary resources to realise child rights. The Committee on the Rights of the Child consistently calls on countries to develop child-specific budgeting as a key aspect of implementing the CRC (Lundy, Orr and Marshall, 2020<sup>[58]</sup>). Pressure can come from child interest groups too who may find the concept of child-specific budgeting appealing as it allows a monetary value to be put on spending on children. However, by itself, a **monetary value on child-related spending tells nothing about how efficient spending is nor whether it assists the achievement of child well-being policy goals.**

Some countries have child-specific budgetary reporting obligations that contribute to meeting obligations under the CRC. For instance, Sweden must report within each area of the Budget Bill the results of relevant child rights initiatives. To help, the Swedish Ombudsperson for Children has developed the children's account tool to help the administration to evaluate how their activities have affected children and young people's well-being when making their annual financial statement.

A goal of child-specific budgeting is to prioritise public spending on children through guiding decision-making and resource allocation and to improve efficiency and equity of spending. Mexico saw an increase in child spending since introducing child-specific budgeting, however it is impossible to say whether child-specific budgeting generated greater spending on children, over the influence of economic, political and other factors (Cummins, 2016<sup>[59]</sup>).

**The most obvious impact of child-specific budgeting to date has been improved transparency of spending on children.** Child-specific budgeting's effect on maximising efficiency or equity of spending has been weaker, possibly due to the difficulties in embedding child-specific budgeting practices within public financial management (Cummins, 2016<sup>[59]</sup>). Child-specific budgeting needs to be based on a methodology that can be used across government ministries and agencies, which is difficult to realise given differences in capacity to produce data on spending and to disaggregate every part of spending to its impact on children.

**Child-specific budgeting takes time (and resources) to produce, thus limiting the potential of results to influence current spending decisions.** Therefore, it can make sense to look at incorporating child-well-being priorities into existing budgetary processes to allow information on child well-being to be considered at the same time as other policy priorities. Some countries have experience of incorporating child well-being priorities into performance budgeting and well-being budgeting frameworks. Here, the choice of child well-being indicators is key, as well as the use of targets or performance thresholds, and the ability to disaggregate information to facilitate better targeting.

Scotland (UK), for example, incorporated one national outcome for children and young people into its performance budgeting framework, the National Performance Framework. Scotland uses performance budgeting to inform budget decisions and to provide information to the public on the purpose of spending and the results achieved. Government departments and agencies at central government and the local level use the framework as a tool to work together and to align efforts.

Scotland's choice of national outcome for children and young people is broad, however the seven indicators that the government uses to measure progress provide a good overview of child well-being and identify areas that need improvement. Each indicator has change criteria to signal whether things are getting better, worse or staying the same. For example, the indicator on quality of children's service measures the percentage of settings providing funded Early Learning Childcare achieving good or better across all four quality themes. In 2021, the percentage of settings providing funded Early Learning and Childcare achieving Care Inspectorate grades of good or better across all four quality themes was 89.4%. This was a decrease of 1.4 percentage points from the previous year, which is regarded as a significant deterioration based on the performance thresholds. Each indicator is also disaggregated to provide information to identify which groups of children may not be doing as well as others. For example, the indicator on child social and physical development shows the percentage of children with a concern at their 27-30-month developmental review, across eight domains of child development. For the latest year, reporting on this indicator highlighted worse outcomes for children from Black, Caribbean, or African ethnic backgrounds (20.6%), well above the national average (14.9%), and especially for children from the most deprived areas (22.8%) compared to children in the most affluent (8.7%) (Scottish Government, 2023<sup>[60]</sup>).

New Zealand has been assessing, as part of its well-being budgeting, any budget proposals that may have an impact on children and young people against a child well-being priority area covering the integrated plan's six well-being outcomes and the national child poverty reduction targets. New Zealand also has legislation requiring yearly reporting on progress in child poverty reduction, and on the extent to which the budget bill measures will affect child poverty. To date, New Zealand has found that including a child well-being priority area into the budget process makes it easier for officials to consider the integrated plan for child well-being in policy development. Assessing budget bids against this child well-being priority has evidenced that government policy and investment decisions are primarily 'aligned' with the integrated plans, and thus the government's priority goals for child well-being (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>). Moreover, yearly reporting on child poverty reduction has been effective at influencing decision-making. For example, microsimulation modelling of the impact on child poverty rates has become part of New Zealand policy development for income support initiatives, while the child poverty targets have contributed to a number of major Budget policy announcements, such as including the indexation of benefits to wages, and additional discretionary increases to benefits (above the wage adjustments) for three years in a row (2020, 2021, and 2022).

**Other alternatives to child-specific budgeting are broader assessment frameworks that look at the impact of public expenditures on advancing equality and strengthening economic and social rights for different population groups.** These frameworks can look at spending by service delivery domain and provide an indication of whether money spent is delivering on policy objectives. These approaches focus on outcomes and can highlight distributional impacts. For example, Ireland has a Social Impact Assessment methodology to assess the impact of public spending on a set of policies or policy programmes on household outcomes. This methodology was used to assess the distributional impact of public funded ECEC schemes by examining the demographic profile and other characteristics of children on these schemes. This assessment showed the ECEC schemes are broadly meeting policy objectives. The ECEC schemes cater for a variety of ages, as per the eligibility criteria and are mostly provided in areas that are relatively disadvantaged (Ivory, 2016<sup>[61]</sup>).

# 3

## Moving the child well-being policy agenda forward: opportunities and challenges

### Integrated policy plans are seen as offering opportunities for steering the child well-being policy agenda

As the review of evidence in this paper suggests, integrated policy plans for child well-being are seen as offering a range of opportunities for steering the child well-being policy agenda.

Countries generally view the integrated policy plans for child well-being as making a positive contribution to efforts to coordinate cross-government collaboration on child well-being policy agenda. In the Questionnaire and across policy documents, countries describe the **integrated plans as useful for clarifying responsibilities, promoting coherence of actions on child well-being with other government priorities and aligning child well-being policies with international commitments**, such as the SDGs, and international human rights instruments, notably the CRC. Across countries, integrated plans are a basis for introducing new approaches to promoting child well-being, implementing system-wide reforms, and revising legislation concerning children.

**Integrated policy plans can provide the needed strategic direction to promoting child well-being.** For example, Spain's final evaluation of its last integrated plan credits it with improving the country's strategic approach to child well-being (DGFCS, 2018<sup>[27]</sup>). The integrated plan established common approaches and objectives among the involved agencies, which as implementation progressed remained coherent. Italy reported in the Questionnaire that developing regular integrated plans is effective at making public administration and stakeholders commit to shared priorities for child well-being, linked to the role the National Observatory of Childhood and Adolescence plays in codesigning the integrated plan.

**Integrated policy plans can serve as a reference framework for organising cross-government work on child well-being.** For example, an early evaluation of New Zealand's integrated plan finds that government officials primarily see the integrated plan as a way to structure and organise work. Government officials use the integrated plan in policy discussions to consider potential initiatives and actions from a child and youth perspective, finding the integrated plan's structure around achieving six outcomes for children and young people helpful for better understanding child well-being and where the government programme of work fits in. (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>).

**Integrated policy plans can increase the visibility of child well-being issues, yet don't always fully succeed in coordinating the (whole) policy agenda and preventing duplication.** Australia found that despite elevating the priority of children's safety and well-being across Commonwealth state and territorial governments, the country's first integrated plan did not manage to fully coordinate the policy agenda with many key strategies and policies not being consolidated into the integrated plan. Australia's evaluation identified barriers to coordinating the policy agenda, which include the inability to engage state line

ministries in a meaningful way given the focus on child protection, challenges associated with Commonwealth-state/territory roles and responsibilities, and the difficulties delivering on the integrated plan's objective due to territories' changing priorities (PwC, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>).

The Slovak Republic established that the integrated policy plan for child well-being caused duplication and was not the most effective way to coordinate the child well-being agenda. The Slovak Republic had two previous integrated plans and during the development stage of their third ended the project after finding that the updated commitments could be overwhelming secured through other instruments, for example, the national development plan, and sectoral specific plans. Moreover, the country did not think that the updated commitments for child well-being were mutually reinforcing nor contributing to a unified goal (MPSVR SR, 2019<sup>[62]</sup>).

Determining the degree of influence that the integrated policy plans can claim over the child well-being agenda is not easy. Countries may align activities with the integrated plans yet at the same time can find it hard to identify which achievements the integrated plans are responsible for. For example, Australia undertook a significant amount of investment and reform among the policy domains connected to the integrated plan to deliver government priorities. However, while these activities were aligned, they are difficult to attribute directly to the integrated plan (PwC, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). Moving forward, Australia's successor plan has adopted an outcomes framework to enable a **sustained focus on and alignment of policy to focus areas**, and also a Theory of Change to explain how change will occur to achieve the integrated plan's outcomes (DSS, 2023<sup>[63]</sup>).

**Growing the integrated policy plans beyond a guiding framework for the child well-being agenda to become a driver of cross-government work can be difficult.** New Zealand finds that its integrated plan is not yet playing a substantial role in driving policy, investment or actions. Government officials tend to focus on aligning their activities with the integrated policy plan rather than adapting their activities to the plan's expected outcomes (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>). Korea found line ministries paying insufficient attention to using the integrated plan to implement the country's new approach to child policies, which is to develop child-centred policies that fully consider children's needs and rights. Korea's successor plan aims to address this challenge by focusing on policy objectives unique to children (MHW, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>).

Evidence is mixed on whether integrated policy plans aid government and stakeholder to set clear priorities for child well-being. Broad consultations processes behind the integrated plan's development can result in broad agendas, causing **ambiguity over what the government needs to first get right** to promote child well-being. For instance, New Zealand's integrated plan does not provide enough clarity on where stakeholders need to focus efforts, giving rise to the need for the government to give explicit guidance on which outcomes to focus the particular actions, and also to identify a small number of priority areas (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>; DPMC, 2023<sup>[64]</sup>). In a similar vein, a midterm review of Ireland's integrated plan recognised that the integrated plan needed to be more strategic and specific, for example, through focusing efforts on a small number of priorities that would deliver significant benefit to children as opposed to trying to do too much and not making clear progress. Ireland's failures to set clear priorities was associated to a lack of political commitment behind the integrated plan's implementation and general system inertia (Government of Ireland, 2019<sup>[38]</sup>).

## Growing integrated policy plans into a more effective tool for cross-government work

The review of evidence in this paper underlines the challenges that arise as countries implement the integrated policy plans for child well-being. To become more effective, consideration should be given to potentially narrowing down the integrated plan's scope and to identifying ways to incentivise joint work.



Focusing the integrated policy plans on only a small number of cross-government activities might be more impactful. This could mean either **addressing a small number of clear priority issues or cross-cutting issues for which coordinated action by different bodies, administrations, and potentially other civil society organisation and stakeholders is most needed**. They should capture the very issues that are putting children’s well-being most at risk, be that specific problems or tricky implementation issues. Some countries and regions already take this approach, sometimes intentionally from the beginning, or in response to implementation difficulties. For example, Australia has focused its two integrated plan on the “wicked problem” of child maltreatment because meaningful progress cannot be made here without the commitment and engagement of policy portfolios outside of traditional child protection ones. The second plan concentrates on improving information and data sharing to better understand what is not working and improve engagement. While Luxembourg focuses efforts of its first integrated plan on a small number of priority areas only, while also setting some long-term strategic objectives for child well-being to support a long-term child well-being agenda and future integrated plans. These long-term strategic objectives include activities to raise awareness of child rights and promoting research and study on child rights (MNECY, 2022<sup>[65]</sup>). Korea focuses its second integrated plan on areas unique to child policy. Korea’s second integrated plan contains a much smaller number of action areas but more relevant of tasks to strengthen policy coherence and achieve its vision of realising children’s right and giving a high priority to children being happy (MHW, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>).

Orientating the integrated plan around achieving a set of child outcomes is a good way to bring the work of different stakeholders together and to manage a long-term policy agenda. Nevertheless, it is necessary to **regularly clarify which child outcomes stakeholders should focus more efforts towards** and the connected priority actions. For example, New Zealand’s early evaluation underlined that central government agencies need clarity on what the government sees as priority outcomes, and what actions should be accorded importance (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>). New Zealand’s first government review of the integrated plan resulted in agreement and strong support to focus the next stage of implementation on fewer actions and on four priority area. Each of the priority areas will have a Lead Chief Executive/s, who will act as system convenor to help drive policy and investment decisions and support implementation (DPMC, 2023<sup>[64]</sup>). Ireland’s successor integrated plan will retain the structure of the ‘five national outcomes for children and young people’ but to improve policy integration, it will identify commitments and actions for achieving only one or two of the outcomes. This approach also aims to assist getting ‘buy-in’ from line ministries.

**Being clear and explicit about priority groups of vulnerable or marginalised children is needed to drive action to improve outcomes for these children.** The integrated policy plan should reflect and respond well to the needs of marginalised children, which requires adequate representation of marginalised groups in governance structures and the inclusion of policy measures that are sensitive to these children’s cultural or other specific needs. For example, New Zealand’s early evaluation suggests that the integrated plan’s ability to make meaningful changes for Māori children and young people is undermined for not having accorded them priority in the integrated plan. Though Māori children and young people are overrepresented within the integrated plan’s priority groups, the lack of explicit priority for them means that the integrated plan does not focus on their unique and specific needs, preferences and aspirations (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>). New Zealand’s first statutory review identified embedding Te Ao Māori concepts of wellbeing into the Strategy implementation and increasing the representation of iwi/ Māori, Pacific and children and young people (DPMC, 2023<sup>[64]</sup>). Australia found that progress on goals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families was held back by inadequate consultations with these groups, initially to develop the primary document and later the implementation plans, and their limited representation within the governance structures (PwC, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). Moving forward, the successor integrated plan has separate implementation plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which contains a Theory of Change specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.



Integrated policy plans **can be effective at gaining traction across government and from line ministries when used to coordinate work on specific cross-cutting issues**. For instance, Ireland's most successful initiative was led by the integrated plan's advisory mechanism, which identified the pressing need for joint-up action on child poverty. The advisory mechanism convened a sub-group with the Department of Social Protection, which helped influence a whole-of-government approach to child poverty (DCEDIY, 2022<sup>[41]</sup>). New Zealand finds delivering initiatives under the integrated plan's yearly implementation instrumental to getting government agencies to prioritise participation in joint agency working groups and taskforces, such as the First 1000 Days and Debt to Government programmes. New Zealand has good cross-government engagement on child poverty, which is aided by mechanisms existing alongside the plan such as legislative requirements to set and report on progress towards child poverty targets (Carter et al., 2022<sup>[37]</sup>).

To encourage greater traction and buy-in, governments need to think further about **changing established policy making processes and incentivising joint work**. For example, adequate human and budgetary resources are needed to minimise the coordination burden, but very few countries report in the Questionnaire a dedicated budget to encourage and facilitate joint work, with some finding it easier to find budget agreement on activities that don't require coordination. Ensuring transparency of the budgetary implications of the integrated policy plan for each respective ministry may help to address concerns on the impact on budgets for delivering activities and avoid increasing competition.

Finally, the integrated policy plans should be **a tool for putting the right policy pieces into place for integrating service delivery to support children with complex needs**. While best approaches will differ across service systems and depending on the target group, it is apparent that countries could be thinking more about how efforts to improve coordination at the policy level could positively spill over into service delivery. For instance, Australia's successor integrated plan focuses more directly on service integration. Among the key actions here are developing mechanisms to ensure an effective interface between child and family services and disability services to support timely responses and information sharing and developing multi-disciplinary intervention models (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023<sup>[66]</sup>). Similarly, New Zealand will focus the next stage of implementation on improving coordination and alignment across agencies and between agencies and communities.

### Strengthening mechanisms to foster policy integration

This paper illustrates the many and various mechanisms and tools that OECD countries have put in place to strengthen the integration of child well-being policies. In respects to the integrated plan for child well-being, child consultations happen across the board while many countries make efforts to reinforce coordination to drive implementation. Using indicator sets, child-specific budgeting and child impact assessments to steer policy development and implementation is less routine (Table 8).

**Table 8. Mechanisms and tools in place to promote policy coordination of integrated policy plans**

Country/region	Children consulted during design phase	Coordination committee	Input from Centre of Government	Regular reporting	Indicator set	Child-specific budgeting	Obligation for child impact assessments
Australia	✓	✓			✓		
Austria		✓					✓
Austria (Vienna)	✓	✓		✓			
Belgium (Wallonia)	✓			✓			
Canada (British Columbia)				✓			
Chile	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Colombia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Costa Rica	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Czech Republic		✓		✓			✓
Estonia	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
France	✓	✓		✓			✓
Finland	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Finland (Helsinki)	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Greece	✓	✓		✓			✓
Iceland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Italy	✓	✓					✓
Ireland	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Japan	✓		✓	✓			
Korea		✓		✓	✓		✓
Latvia				✓			✓
Lithuania				✓	✓		
Luxembourg	✓	✓		✓			✓
New Zealand	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Portugal	✓	✓		✓			
Slovenia	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Spain	✓			✓	✓		✓
Spain (Valencia)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Sweden	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)	✓						✓
United Kingdom (Scotland)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
United Kingdom (Wales)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
United States	✓				✓		

Note: Under child consulted during design phase column, information on Costa Rica applies to forthcoming integrated plan only. Coordination committee refers to a mechanism to facilitate cross-government coordination and implementation of the integrated, which in some countries/regions also is responsible for implementation. Regular reporting means that reporting happens every two years at a very minimum. Obligation for child impact assessment does not infer that child impact assessments are an institutionalised practice.

Source: 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire.

The inclusion of the discussed mechanisms and tools into the policy cycle is crucial to better inform policy making; their inclusion can also help make the child well-being policy agenda less dependent on political will if they are part of the routine procedures and mechanisms that administrations of all governments must comply with. **Important challenges remain, which prevent these mechanisms and tools from playing a fully effective role in steering and monitoring policies for children.**

### ***Child consultation***

Child consultations have become a clear priority for OECD countries based on the high involvement of children in designing the integrated plans, the emergence of new child participation structures, and the prominence assigned to child participation within the integrated plans themselves. Consulting with children to formulate the priorities for child well-being is important for understanding what issues are important to children and to ensure that the integrated plans address key issues of concern of children themselves. However, **just as great of efforts are needed to consult with children about their needs for services and supports**, during the integrated plan's design stage as well as in its monitoring.

Learning from children about their experiences of accessing supports and the barriers they may face could provide key information on the effectiveness of measures, and thus inform whatever adjustments are needed. A key challenge ahead for enhancing the role of child consultation is to ensure the **necessary institutional capacity to take on board children's views and opinions** at key junctures in the policy cycle, as well as aligning the timeline of consultations (especially those with vulnerable children that often take longer) with the policy-making process.

### ***Accountability/reporting mechanisms***

Developing integrated plans to deal with cross-cutting issues often comes with the risk of inflating too much reporting requirements, and on a day-to-day level, increasing the number of meetings that civil servants are expected to attend to provide information on needs and progresses. **To make efficient use of resources, strong efforts are needed to align reporting obligations across ministries and levels of governments to the greatest extent possible.**

Reporting on the integrated plans' implementation can focus too much on listing progress on activities, rather than identifying barriers and challenges. **When evaluations are, at least in part, completed by an external agency or body, they tend to be more critical and likely to identify challenges that call for breaking away from routine practices.** However, very few countries have clear plans for an independent body to conduct at least part of the integrated plan's evaluation. Combining external evaluation with internal audit is nonetheless one way to ensure that learning can draw on diverse set of expertise.

### ***Indicator sets***

A crucial step in achieving integration of child well-being policies is to strengthen the potential of child well-being indicator sets to: (i) build a shared diagnosis of children's situation; (ii) inform policy conceptualisation and priority setting; and (iii) monitor and evaluate policy implementation. Herein lies several challenges.

The first challenge is grasping the multidimensional nature of children's needs and development and the interlinkages between dimensions of well-being and cross-cutting issues, in order to inform which areas of action need to be considered if policies are to impact effectively on child outcomes. For example, it is important to capture how children's physical and mental health may affect their engagement or achievement at school, bearing in mind that this may depend on the economic and material situation of families, and may also differ for girls and boys. To do this, **it is necessary to have the capacity to disaggregate data by personal, family or socio-economic characteristics, and to integrate different data sources with information on different areas of children's lives and of their families.** However, existing data sources in different areas are often scattered, produced separately and for different purposes. Strengthening the capacity to link different data sources can help produce information on cross-cutting issues.

A second challenge lies in countries' capacity to **fill the data gaps relating to critical periods of children's development and to highly vulnerable groups of children** (OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>). The most

vulnerable children have complex needs requiring a range of coordinated supports. Making policies more effective for these children requires strengthening efforts to collect data on these groups, as for instance, children exposed to violence, children in alternative care, children with a disability, or children from Indigenous communities (UNECE, 2022<sup>[67]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>). The **regularity and timeliness of data production** is also critical to ensure that indicator sets can be used to track progress and monitor trends in child well-being and policy implementation.

Exploring ways to make **better use of untapped information collected by service providers** is also critical to consolidating the information base on policy implementation. For instance, in Finland, it has been suggested that information collected by professionals in counselling centres and school health care services could help provide reliable information on the well-being, needs and support offered to children in a vulnerable position (Lahtela and Pärnänen, 2023<sup>[51]</sup>).

Thirdly, national policies for promoting children's well-being are implemented in territories that are heterogeneous. As the socio-economic profiles and support needs of the population differ, so do too the intensity of support needed and the capacity of policies to reach their targets and deliver the expected goals and outcomes. **It is therefore necessary that the data reflect territorial heterogeneity**, in order to assess population needs, measuring whether the policy measures are reaching the target populations, and if they are not, to inform on the nature of the obstacles or specific challenges faced in certain territories to address children's needs.

**The production of information on children requires strong coordination at the national and subnational levels.** A dedicated cooperation group can be valuable resource to take care of the development of the knowledge base, fill data gaps and avoid duplication in data collection in close cooperation with various data producers. Such coordination entity could also work around producing standards for data collection to be adopted by data producers to support the data harmonisation process et get better comparability across territories. The coordinating entity could also play an important role in planning and setting up priorities on how the information base should be further developed (Lahtela and Pärnänen, 2023<sup>[51]</sup>).

Strengthening countries' capacity to use the full range of available indicators to steer policies is critical in order to rationalise and legitimise the development of large set of indicators which is costly. Some indicators can serve to assess the success of country's strategic commitments and integrated plan's on achieving child outcomes, while others to track policy implementation and measure policy output. Other indicators have a looser link to existing policy plans but are needed to keep abreast of the challenges in children's lives, and to adjust policies and develop new measures accordingly. Clarifying how the different indicators are to be used is likely to reinforce the consensus on the importance of developing and keeping them up to date.

Finally, policy makers and decision makers must reconcile the demand for evidence of a policy impact with the **need to communicate on simple and widely understood policy targets**. Many countries are understandably keen to set quantifiable policy targets to make governments accountable for the actual impact and effectiveness of child well-being policies. Measuring policy-induced progress requires policy-sensitive outcome measures, or in other words, measures that can detect changes in the situation of the target population. However, when a population group is not well covered by the survey used to calculate aggregate indicators, or only represents only a small share of the population covered by population-wide indicators, outcomes measures based on the total population are not likely to capture the relevant changes. Aggregate indicators may record an absence of change, but this does not necessarily mean that the policy had no effect at all or that it failed to improve children's lives. The demand for evidence of policy impact can make it tempting to focus actions on "low-hanging fruits" (i.e., measures that will have the most immediate impact on the selected indicators) at the expense – and risk – of **disregarding very important measures that only target small population groups of children or that may have a less direct impact on the chosen indicator**.

### ***Child Impact Assessments***

CIAAs are a tool for shedding a qualitative light on how a proposed law, reform or programme is likely to impact on children's lives and contribute to the realisation of their rights. Overall, CIAAs can help to identify potential policy impacts that are likely to benefit certain groups of children or to influence certain aspects of children's well-being, and in this sense if undertaken early enough in the policymaking process can be useful for prioritising policy actions. However, their use in budgetary decisions is generally limited; CIAAs only provide a high-level discussion of the anticipated impact of policy measures, with no discussion about the cost involved and the resources needed. **A better integration of CIAAs into child-specific budgeting processes** therefore is key to evaluate whether resources are sufficient in relation to children's needs and whether funds are allocated efficiently, as suggested for instance in Finland (Aho and Penttilä, 2022<sup>[55]</sup>).

CIAAs are not used extensively across the OECD, but some countries have an interest in building CIAA expertise and extending their practice within government. There is a **need for countries to learn from each other's experiences of conducting CIAAs**, especially to inform which areas of policies and what stages of the policy process stand to benefit the most from the evidence and insights that CIAAs may produce.

CIAA tools need to be as straightforward as possible and capable of generating information that makes children's issues more visible across government. **Lack of disaggregated data compromises the potential of CIAAs to shine a light on the situation of vulnerable groups of children** and the potential impact of policies and decision-making on their well-being.

Conducting CIAAs is resource intensive, in terms of civil servants' time but also developing their competencies around child well-being and child rights, and funding for expert inputs. Therefore, there is a need to set priorities for conducting CIAAs as assessing the impact of each and every policy would be extremely costly. **One possibility is to prioritise CIAAs for assessing the potential impact of income support measures and of services delivered to children and their families and to the whole population.** The latter can have an impact on child well-being, even if service don't primarily target children. A first step is to evaluate the extent to which policy measures actually reach children, especially the most disadvantaged or those with higher needs.

### ***Budget/resource allocation***

Securing resources for child well-being objectives is complicated due to the need for ministries to commit budgets for transversal actions. There is only limited evidence of dedicated budgets for supporting the integrated plans' coordination and to encourage cross-government work on child well-being more broadly.

Child-specific budgeting offers a way to determine whether policies and programmes for children are adequately funded and to help mobilise resources. However, **child-specific budgeting requires a methodology that can be used across government and is time- and resource-intensive to produce, which limits the potential of results to influence current spending decisions.** Incorporating child well-being priorities into existing budgetary processes offers a way for child well-being to be considered alongside other government priorities.

**Aligning budget allocation processes with cross-cutting policies and targets is critical.** In many cases, the ministry making decisions on total budget allocation is not the one contracting service providers and overseeing their activities and evaluations. Therefore, processes and timelines may not fully align. For example, making decisions on subsidising the provision of services that are fully anticipated from the early stages of the budget allocation decision-making process, or when additional resources are required by service providers to engage on issues which were not fully understood when designing action plans.

It is also critical that **developing integrated plans comes hand-in-hand with the involved administrations receiving adequate funding to deliver on actions to address children's needs** that

are outside of their traditional programmes of work and budget. To ensure decisions are made on the basis of the best possible information, it is important – to the furthest extent possible – to align timelines and reporting requirements of the organisations delivering services, the administrations overseeing them, and of the administration making decisions on public expenditures.

Last but not least, one limit of existing child-specific budgeting practices is that they focus too much on estimating the amounts of public expenditure, and too little on the “value for money” generated by those expenditures. An important challenge to best inform budget decisions therefore is to embed child-specific budgeting practices into a broader assessment of the value for money of public investments for children, where the engaged budget is assessed against the outputs generated by the implementation of programmes and the outcomes for children.

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# Annex A. 2022 OECD Child Well-being Policy Questionnaire

You can find the online Annex at this link: <https://www.oecd.org/wise/Annex-Integrated-policy-making-for-child-well-being.xlsx>.