

# Child Friendly Cities: An international initiative promoting child participation in local government

A 'child friendly city' is defined as any local system of governance, urban or rural, large or small, committed to fulfilling children's rights under the Convention. The international Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) was launched in 1996 to act on the resolution passed during the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to make cities livable places for all. The conference declared that the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy habitat, a democratic society and good governance.

The initiative reflects the growing urbanization of global societies, with half the world's population now living in cities, and the increasing importance of municipalities in political and economic decision-making that affects child rights. An international secretariat for Child Friendly Cities was created in 2000 at UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy. Consistent with the centre's mission, the secretariat collects, documents, distils and disseminates experience on local frameworks to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

A child-friendly city aims to guarantee children's rights to essential services, such as health, education, shelter, safe water and decent sanitation, and protection from violence, abuse and exploitation. It also seeks to empower young citizens to influence decisions about their city, express their opinion on the city they want, and participate in family community and social life. It promotes children's rights to walk safely in the streets by themselves, meet friends and play, live in an unpolluted environment with green spaces, participate in cultural and social events and be an equal citizen of

their city with access to every service, without discrimination of any kind.

The process of establishing child-friendly cities involves the following nine elements that promote child rights: participation in decision making; a child-friendly legal framework; a city-wide child rights strategy; a child rights unit or coordinating mechanisms; child impact assessment and evaluation; a children's budget; a regular State of the City's Children report; advocating child rights; and independent advocacy for children.

During the past decade, a number of cities and municipalities across the world have made the political decision to become 'child-friendly'. Child-friendly cities programmes have been adopted by many European cities to sensitize mayors and city councils on child rights, ensure that children feature in the local political agenda and promote city-level policies for children. London, for instance, published its third *State of London's Children Report* in 2007. In Italy, the Ministry of the Environment coordinates the child-friendly cities initiatives, which have been adopted by many towns and cities. Child councils are a favoured model of child participation in Italy and other European countries, providing a formal mechanism for children's views to be expressed within local administrations. These councils are often instigators of child-friendly initiatives, promoting participatory policy-making and greater mobility and civil engagement of children and young people.

The developing world also has an important number of initiatives. In the Philippines, child-friendly cities programmes started in the late 1990s. The

initiative has a national dimension through a goal-oriented framework that aims to promote child-rights principles at every level, from the family through community to the city or region. Since 1998, the national government has been giving 'Presidential awards' for child-friendly cities and municipalities. In South Africa, the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council's initiative includes the development of a Metropolitan Programme of Action for Children. The programme empowers children to directly influence local laws, incorporates child rights into city planning and allocates major resources to the city's most deprived children.

In the Ecuadorian cities of Cuenca, Guayaquil, Quito, Riobamba and Tena, children help define criteria for a child-friendly city. Under the auspices of La Ciudad que Queremos (The City We Want) initiative, children and adolescents participate in municipal decisions and promote their own rights. In Georgia, the Children and Youth Parliament of Georgia has become a primary forum for children and young people to express their views, gain skills in governance and raise awareness on child rights.

Despite its 13-year history, the Child Friendly Cities Initiative is still nascent, and many of the initiatives that are under way have yet to be comprehensively monitored and evaluated. Yet it remains a strong step towards fuller and more meaningful child participation in community decisions that affect them. Building on the progress achieved by the initiative will be critical to fulfilling child rights in a world that is becoming ever more urbanized.

*See References, pages 90–92.*