Update on the context and trends

OGIP was established in August 2019 as part of a repositioning and realignment exercise, with the purpose of assisting the organization in interpreting, and engaging in, a rapidly changing world. By fulfilling this vision, OGIP would address a gap identified in UNICEF’s existing capacity by the organization’s leadership. OGIP serves as an internal think-tank, providing UNICEF with intelligence on a range of issues with implications for children and its work, equipping the organization with policy ideas to shape the global discourse, and preparing it for the future by scanning the horizon for frontier issues and ways of working.

OGIP was created from the posts and resources of the Policy section of the former Data, Research and Policy (DRP) Division, after the separation of the Strategic Planning unit and the Learning and Knowledge Exchange unit to the Division of Data, Analysis, Planning and Monitoring (DAPM), and the Migration, Urban and Climate teams to the Program Division (PD). The creation of OGIP represented, in practice, a refinement and elevation of the preceding policy function, resulting in greater prominence of, and demand for, this work, and the pursuit of greater impact.

OGIP’s work and goals are organized around three functions: intelligence, global discourse, and frontiers.

Through our intelligence function, OGIP seeks to make UNICEF more cognizant and responsive to global factors and trends that affect its work and the lives of children. This is done by conducting analysis on a range of external issues based on soliciting needs across the organization, identifying implications, translating into options or recommendations, and socializing with relevant parts of the organization through different channels. Through our global discourse function, OGIP aspires to drive richer debate and awareness of child issues in the public sphere, in a way that ultimately yields new policy ideas and stronger support behind them. We pursue this by generating strategic, high-impact assets including commentaries, briefings, and the flagship State of the World Children’s report. Through our frontiers function, OGIP aims to enhance understanding of, and effective action on, frontier issues that directly affect children and frontier approaches to child programming. This function is carried out by leading UNICEF’s exploration on new issues and ways of working through high-quality analysis and external policy engagement.

This report reflects on OGIP’s first full calendar year. While OGIP was formally initiated in August 2019, our budget was not finalized until February 2020, and we have been close to fully staffed since only August 2020. Our achievements and learnings are therefore drawn from this period when OGIP was continuing to take shape, and as we worked to translate the vision captured in our Office Management Plan into practice.

As has now been well-documented, 2020 was a catastrophic year for children, in which the COVID pandemic rolled back global progress across a range of dimensions of child wellbeing. While children have thankfully been largely spared from severe COVID infections, the broader effects of the crisis on the young have caused untold harm and are poised to reset the forces that have driven progress for the world’s children since the start of this century. Children, especially the most vulnerable among them, have disproportionately borne the collateral damage from the policies and behaviors that the pandemic has induced over the last year. There is thankfully some salvation to this story – the unleashing of new medical breakthroughs, renewed recognition of the importance of global health security, an awakening of the threat of mental health, raised expectations on governments to provide minimum social protections to households in the wake of shocks – which, while not yet guaranteed, have the potential
to be seized as we emerge from this global crisis. Against this backdrop, OGIP has sought to help UNICEF navigate this fast-changing terrain and identify strategic opportunities for our organization in realizing a fast recovery and better outcomes for children.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

*Intelligence*

OGIP’s intelligence function represents a new capacity for the organization. In developing this function, we were faced with a tabula rasa without previous experience or efforts on which to build. In our first year, OGIP has been able to quickly institutionalize various elements of this function, experiment with others, and achieved significant internal traction.

The most prominent product from our intelligence function is our weekly production of “deep dives”. These internal briefs provide a rapid analysis, or primer, of a trending issue and draws out implications for UNICEF and children. During 2020, we published 19 deep dives covering a wide range of issues. In the process, we built a repository of knowledge for colleagues wishing to access robust, accessible and politically astute analysis on a given issue. The circulation of our deep dives has gradually expanded as our office has institutionalized their production, from OED, to the GMT, to all heads of offices, deputies, and eventually to all staff via our office newsletter and SharePoint. Virtually every deep dive has generated positive feedback from different parts of the organization, while a number have led to specific follow-up actions driven by OED, including those on misinformation, vaccine hesitancy, and the debt crisis. Another indicator of relevance of the deep dives has been the extent to which colleagues across UNICEF have proposed further topics, offered to collaborate, or asked whether the material could be shared with external parties who they believed would be interested in the content. These requests again come in on virtually a weekly basis.

A second product from our intelligence function is the generation of outlook assessments. We began 2020 by preparing an outlook assessment for the year ahead that was presented at the GMT. In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, we produced two outlook assessments examining the trajectory of the pandemic, its impact on UNICEF and children and broader trends. These assessments emphasized that the impact of the pandemic on children would occur primarily through the catastrophic effects of a global economic recession; made the case for a global market mechanism for bulk and equitable purchases of vaccines drawing from UNICEF’s lessons from the unequivocally successful pneumococcal Advance Market Commitment (AMC); warned of headwinds and uncertainty for global aid flows; and questioned the efficacy of lockdowns in low-income, urban environments. Each of these insights has proven to be correct.

Our COVID-19 outlook assessments provided the foundation for a common narrative on the impact of COVID-19 on children that was jointly presented with EMOPS and PD to the GMT in June 2020. Elements of the assessment were subsequently presented to various internal and external audiences including a private audience of UNICEF foundation partners; UNICEF’s annual meeting with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; a Save the Children staff retreat; the ED's External Advisory Council (twice); and ROSA, ESARO and EAPRO RMTs. OGIP’s analysis of the global economy and its impact on revenues was presented to the September GMT, and was used to inform the work of UNICEF’s Financial Advisory Committee.

Towards the end of 2020, OGIP was tasked with producing a medium-term outlook assessment to inform the preparation of UNICEF’s new Strategic Plan. The assessment warned that the forces underlying global progress for children over the last decades faced a reckoning in the light of the global COVID pandemic, and the consequences - both positive and negative - that flowed from this
reset. The draft outlook was shared with various committees working across UNICEF on the new Strategic Plan, as well as with the Supply Division to inform their OMP. Its messages provide a foundation for the ongoing drafting of the new Strategic Plan.

In response to a request from the Iran Country Office, OGIP carried out analysis on the global impact of modern-day economic sanctions on children, which has been deployed by the Country Office to advocate for more effective humanitarian carve outs. Another request from EAPRO and LACRO prompted OGIP to explore the trend towards shrinking civic space and its impact on UNICEF operations and adolescents, and the lessons from other aid and human rights organizations that are seeking to navigate this changing terrain. This analysis is currently being used to reassess the approach by Country Offices to youth empowerment and protests in the EAPRO region.

**Global discourse**

In July 2020, the Office of Global Insight and Policy commissioned a large, cross-country survey that will take stock of the state of childhood in the 21st century. The survey aims to shed new light on how today’s children see the world, how their perspective differs from that of adults, and how their experience of childhood differs from that of children in the past.

Representative samples of two separate generations will be surveyed (15-24 years and 40+ years). Gallup, a world leader in conducting global polls, is implementing the survey in 21 countries representing a range of regions and income levels. A global report, complemented by an interactive, immersive website, is planned for 2021, and country-level data will be available for further analysis. Focal points from the 21 countries who are jointly funding and developing the poll have been closely engaged throughout the development of the survey instrument and anticipate use of the data, when it is available, to promote debate and attention to contemporary issues facing children at a country and global level.

The OGIP team conceptualized and completed the first draft of the latest edition of the State of the World’s Children (SOWC) report, focused on mental health. Preparations included extensive collaboration with colleagues within UNICEF, particularly those within the Office of Research and Programme Division, and externally. Expert reviews were commissioned from academics around the world and their inputs synthesized in the draft document which was then sent for review to a group of over 30 opinion leaders and researchers. In parallel, support and funding were secured from the Wellcome Trust, and a collaboration with Johns Hopkins University was established to undertake focus group discussions aimed at identifying the perspectives of young people on mental health. Liaison with country offices and national committees was maintained and a number were identified as being sources for case studies to be conducted in 2021. The report will be launched in 2021, around the time of World Mental Health Day on 10 October.

Also in 2020, following on from the launch of the 2019 State of the World’s Children report on nutrition, two special reports were launched: Food and me: how adolescents experience nutrition across the world and Feeding my child: how young mothers experience nutrition across the world. Both these reports were produced in collaboration with the University of Western Sydney, Australia. The food systems framework that was put forward in the SOWC on nutrition, complemented by the nutrition strategy which was developed in parallel, has become the basis for UNICEF’s programming to address the triple burden of malnutrition – underweight, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight – that increasing numbers of countries are facing.

Among other notable deliverables, OGIP led UNICEF’s analysis on the global debt crisis and co-authored a joint op-ed for the Executive Director and Kevin Watkins, CEO of Save the Children, on the case for international debt relief to help children, which was published in *El Pais*. 
In April 2020, OGIP was tasked with leading the development of a report for the UN Secretary-General on the impact of COVID-19 on children. This was one of a series of high-profile reports produced in the pandemic’s first weeks, when understanding of the global ramifications of the virus on different populations, playing out through various channels, was still limited. OGIP produced the report from start to finish in under a week, preparing the first full draft in under 48 hours before working across the UN agencies to ensure buy-in. The report generated significant media coverage and, more importantly, provided a unifying narrative of COVID-19’s impact on children. That narrative continues to be used by child advocates and beyond, noting that the focus on counting COVID-19 cases and deaths risks distracting the world from the catastrophic effects of the pandemic on children, which extend far beyond the sphere of health and are largely a result of mitigation measures that in some settings will do more harm than good.

**Frontiers**

- **Featured projects**

**AI and children:** One of OGIP’s flagship initiatives is the AI for Children project, run in partnership with the Government of Finland, through which UNICEF has developed the first UN AI policy guidance focused on children to determine how AI-related opportunities are maximized and risks minimized. The Policy Guidance on AI for Children, aimed at governments and industry, contains practical recommendations and principles for the development of child-centred AI. The guidance was co-developed through a broad consultative process with inputs from a variety of experts aiming to capture the local AI-related needs and realities of policymakers and businesses around the world, and included children’s voices in the process. Five consultation workshops were convened with experts on AI systems, children and digital rights in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean and North America. Over 200 participants from government, the private sector, academia, civil society and UN agencies representing 39 countries were involved. Almost 250 children were consulted through nine workshops held in Brazil, Chile, South Africa, Sweden and the United States. The draft guidance was launched on 16 September 2020 through a public webinar which was attended by nearly 240 participants across 52 countries. The guidance was put forth for public consultation to improve the next version, and 50 submissions were received from international organizations, government, private sector, academia, and civil society. The guidance was well received by the media, particularly on social media, with news of the launch reaching a potential audience of more than 23 million and close to 2,000 interactions.

**Data Governance:** OGIP convened a group of 17 experts to work together towards the development of a global manifesto on good governance of children’s data. The working group met seven times in 2020 and deliberated on key issues and tensions related to children’s data. The working group members developed a series of background papers exploring issues such as government surveillance, use of children’s data through marketing and advertising, data protection in education, group data and others. The final Manifesto is expected to be released in May 2021. The papers and the Manifesto will be used to raise awareness on issues pertaining to the use of children’s data and to influence governments and the private sector to specifically address children’s rights in data governance frameworks.

**Climate Mobility:** To better understand how children and young people are affected by migration and displacement linked to climate change, and to enhance their visibility in public policy, UNICEF and IOM co-hosted a virtual symposium entitled Climate Mobility and Children in early November 2020. The event was attended by 45 leading topic experts, including representatives from UN agencies, academia, civil society, policymakers, as well as young climate and migration activists. The group explored existing debates surrounding climate-related mobilities, and deliberated on opportunities for integrating children’s needs and rights into evolving policy discussions and future legal frameworks.
including a draft action plan for future engagement.

- **Rapid analysis**

In addition to our larger featured projects, OGIP developed a series of analytical products for broad public audiences on a number of frontier issues and topics. These products were produced either in response to needs identified by the organization or to look ahead to anticipate new challenges and trends.

OGIP produced an issue brief, Putting the ‘learning’ back in remote learning, in the early stage of the pandemic. This issue brief drew on past evidence to unpack the key elements of effective continuity learning, analyzed emerging remote learning practices to identify positive trends and gaps vis-à-vis the effective continuity of learning frameworks, and identified some priority areas of action to ensure that remote learning strategies during and after school closures deliver learning for all. The recommendations were shaped with inputs from OoR and Education Section, PD. Since its publication, the issue brief has been referenced in publications by the UN SDG and UN DESA; in a USAID white paper on remote learning in the Philippines; in the guidance developed by the UNESCO Chair in ICT for Development with the EdTech Hub; as well as in multiple other papers and articles (e.g., here, here, here, here, here).

Despite children’s disproportionate vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, they are consistently overlooked in the design and content of climate policies and related processes. With this in mind, OGIP undertook a rapid analysis to assess and contribute to addressing the gap between current practice and a ‘child-sensitive’ approach to climate policymaking, namely one in which the particular needs, vulnerabilities, rights and agency of the child are considered and used to inform climate policies. Focusing on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), the analysis found that only 42 per cent of all NDCs contain direct reference to children or youth while only 20 per cent mention children specifically and less than two per cent mention the rights of children. In reference to NAPs, only 11 of 13 explicitly refer to children or youth, viewing them as both a vulnerable group and as beneficiaries in terms of education and health interventions. The analysis also made recommendations for principles to be applied to make climate policies child sensitive.

OGIP conducted original analysis on digital civic engagement, examining how young people today use digital technologies to engage in civic and political life and how this participation moves from the online to the offline world. Our paper was developed at the request of the UNICEF adolescent programme in order to inform the development of a youth engagement strategy. The findings were shared at an online seminar attended by more than 250 people and the paper was subsequently cited in various studies and through the work of the non-profit sector supporting young people’s participation.

Through a collaboration with UN University in Portugal, OGIP examined the growing prominence of government digital services for children. This analysis looks at the drivers of digital transformation of public services, their relevance for children and their families and key challenges governments face to ensure child-sensitive digital services. Through examination of five country case studies, the paper offers concrete recommendations to policymakers. The paper has been broadly disseminated. The abridged version was also shared with Cetic.br, the Regional Center for Studies on the Development of the Information Society from Brazil, at their request for inclusion in their flagship report.

In collaboration with PD’s Education Section, OGIP co-developed the report Towards an equal future: Reimagining girls’ education through STEM which presents a call to action for global, national and
regional actors to the potential of STEM education to transform gender norms in the education system and to highlight key actions that can accelerate girls’ transition between education and STEM careers. As a complement to the call to action, OGIP led the production of a data companion Mapping gender equality in STEM from school to work. The data companion was innovatively packaged as an attractive and easily digestible visual story board, which traces gender disparities in STEM over the life course — from children’s participation and performance in STEM at different stages of education to their transitions to STEM employment and entrepreneurship, highlighting key barriers that constrain girls from achieving in STEM at different stages of their life. The data companion was very well-received, and has been shared directly by OED with UNDSG, UNSG and donor partners. The data companion has also been used by UNICEF in our engagement with partners (notably, the French government). It has also been used as an input to UNICEF’s new Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan.

In preparation for a new post-2020 global biodiversity framework in 2021, OGIP developed an explainer on biodiversity and its importance for children. In order to innovatively present the information, an illustrator was hired to draw vignette illustrations to accompany the article. The illustrations served to bring the narrative to life, an innovative and creative way to make the article visually appealing and easy to digest.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Responding to COVID: Like all UNICEF offices, OGIP was forced to adapt rapidly to a COVID-19 world, in which the threats posed to children’s rights and well-being around the world suddenly escalated, the priorities of the organization consequently shifted, and the working patterns of our team had to be instantaneously recast. Operationally, OGIP established new processes and practices to check in on staff health, to allow colleagues to continue to work in collaborative ways, to on-board new colleagues, to build team spirit and a supportive culture, and to help colleagues adjust to working from home. OGIP also rapidly pivoted the content of our work to respond to the crisis of the moment, postponing some activities in our workplans while adapting others, and creating more space in our planning to allow us to be responsive to organizational needs. These adjustments were not straightforward and the workload for several OGIP staff became unsustainable at times during 2020. On a positive note, the team came together strongly during the year in a way that built trust and good faith among colleagues, demonstrating the capacity to forge effective working relationships in trying circumstances. In addition, the fast-evolving nature of the pandemic gave greater impetus to OGIP’s ambition to turnover work quickly (as with the deep dives) while establishing common threads between different pieces of work to build expertise and knowledge in different areas of strategic interest.

Building a new, distinct and positive team culture: Due to the many changes in personnel, especially in the context of responding to COVID-19 and having to work from home, we put a considerable amount of energy into refining and strengthening our team culture in 2020 by defining and modeling how we want to show up for each other as a nascent office introducing a new function at UNICEF. Our annual retreat in March provided a valuable opportunity to get acquainted with the tools and practices of a fully remote team. The retreat helped colleagues feel more informed and aligned with the Office functions and aspirations for 2020, as well as more connected at a time of great uncertainty. We used this opportunity to discuss how OGIP might pivot in the context of COVID-19, which led to valuable conversations about OGIP’s intelligence function. In order to stay connected and create space for us to meet as a whole office regularly, we decided to run our all-staff meetings every two weeks instead of once a month.

Our product line: OGIP has demonstrated an ability to quickly respond to pressing issues by developing short, succinct and informative products, as well as to tackle bigger and broader challenges
by developing a body of work that looks in depth at frontier issues and global trends. Examples of short products carried out with quick turnaround time include commentaries, deep dives and issues aimed to inform and alert the organization about new and emerging issues. Examples of projects where we invested in deeper analysis, carried out broad consultations with a range of stakeholders and developed a set of actionable policy recommendations include AI policy guidance, climate and mobility initiative and data governance. Being a new office with a rapid growth also meant that we needed to be selective with what we chose to address and prioritize the work where we can make the biggest impact. Catering to the needs of different audiences also meant delivering different types of products that are timely, relevant and impactful.

Refining and listening to our audiences: OGIP has several audiences for its work, reflecting its different functions. These are, most notably, the external global development and child rights community, UNICEF’s leadership, and UNICEF’s staff in the field. Over 2020, OGIP received growing feedback from across these audiences as the volume of our output increased and our communication and dissemination efforts grew. A few common lessons emerge. First, OGIP’s ability to identify and parse issues of growing interest has found formidable traction within the organization, most notably in the field where Country Offices may struggle to interpret and analyze these issues on their own. Second, the style of our products – short, visually attractive, making use of accessible language, politically savvy, precise – significantly enhances their value to readers. Third, our partnership with leading voices and institutions on any given issue enhances both the quality of our analysis and the reach of our work.

Maturing as an office: In June, after onboarded new staff to several key posts, OGIP defined new functional teams to support information sharing and encourage collaboration across its units. This included the creation of a Leadership Team focused on the Office’s programmatic vision and priorities; a Management Team which looks at broader Office matters including HR, Operations, Financing; and a third group of staff working on programmatic functions that shapes OGIP’s work and formats of delivery. We also ran several workshops to inform the creation of a planning framework that would enable us to visualize and strategize work that spans a broad timeline spectrum – from longer-term projects to quicker-turnaround pieces. A projects model with a tiered system to inform priorities was further developed and the Leadership Team began using a live dashboard and testing an agile planning model. The concept of Monthly Highlights emerged from the planning framework discussions. This is a mechanism through which the Office highlights a piece of work that builds a moment to generate visibility and traction through leveraging communications and partnerships. We started testing this approach in late 2020 and have learnt a lot of valuable lessons around sequencing and dependencies with other parts of UNICEF and external partners. Our approach to Monthly highlights benefits from internal brainstorms where everyone is encouraged to share their unique perspective and expertise, and to contribute to a generative process that seeks to refine the goals for impact and audiences of OGIP’s work.