Update on the context and trends

Global context intro from Outlook

At the start of 2021, the world was in the midst of its first global pandemic in a century. Fortunately, children were largely spared the most severe of infections, yet the crisis has caused untold harm to the young – and that harm is still being counted.

As a result of the pandemic, the global economy had recorded its deepest contraction since the 1930s, throwing millions of families and their children into poverty. The world saw an unprecedented shuttering of schools, resulting in over a billion children being sent home and jeopardizing their learning and future productivity. We saw broader disruptions to services on which children and their families depend, such as the temporary suspension of immunization campaigns for children setting back coverage rates some 25 years.

Despite that backdrop, 2021 began with a sense of optimism: the emergence of a suite of efficacious vaccines pointed to a potential exit from the pandemic. They were approved in record time and demonstrated the success of committing public resources to spur research and development and buy down risk.

Attention quickly switched to the vaccine roll-out. The COVAX facility, developed in 2020 to facilitate equitable access to the vaccines, saw UNICEF playing a key role – reflecting our strength in global procurement and supply. Yet, at the start of 2021, limited funding of COVAX impeded the ability to secure vaccine supplies, meaning the world’s poorest countries would have longer to to wait.

Beyond COVID, the world continued to grapple with other challenges. We saw a growing realization of the reality of living with climate change – in the wake of devastating bushfires in Australia and the western United States – and renewed demand for social justice with the rise of new movements like Black Lives Matter.

This context was captured in our 2022-2025 Outlook report, reflecting OGIP’s mission to help UNICEF navigate a fast-changing terrain and identify strategic opportunities for our organization in realizing a fast recovery and better outcomes for children.

OGIP’s three functions after its first year

OGIP was created in 2019 as an internal think-tank to provide UNICEF with intelligence on a range of issues with implications for children and its work, to equip the organization with policy ideas to shape the global discourse, and to prepare it for the future by scanning the horizon for frontier issues and ways of working.

By the start of 2021, our team was close to full strength, overseeing a rich portfolio of work and established ways of working that covered our three functions: Intelligence, Global Discourse and Frontiers.

Our Intelligence function seeks to make UNICEF more cognizant and responsive to global factors and trends affecting its work and the lives of children. In 2021, we produced our Outlook 2025 report and 22 Deep Dives to help inform and educate colleagues and the organization's leadership.

Through our Global Discourse function we aspire to drive richer debate and awareness of child issues in the public sphere, in a way that yields new policy ideas and stronger support behind them. In 2021, our projects included the State of the World’s Children report focused on mental health, a study of the impact of economic sanctions on children, and the Changing Childhood Project – the first survey to ask multiple generations across the globe for their views on the world and what it is like to be a child today.

And 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. As part of
this function, we engaged in shaping global policy for children on a suite of issues: artificial intelligence, data governance, and climate mobility. During the course of year, the OGIP team was informed by UNICEF’s leadership of the intention to merge the office with Office of Research – Innocenti. Following this organizational change, which will occur in 2022, OGIP’s three functions will be retained but operating with closer synergies to the research and convening functions in Innocenti.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

**Intelligence | Outcome: UNICEF is more cognizant and responsive to global factors and trends that affect its impact.**

Developed in response to a request to inform the new Strategic plan, OGIP produced *Prospects for Children: A Global Outlook for 2025*, providing a medium-term analysis of the prospects for the world’s children leading up to the planned fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030.

The report examined the nature and consequences of an exit from the COVID pandemic; considered the trajectory of longer-term trends that are critical in shaping the world and children’s lives during this period; and identified other possible events with the potential to define the medium-term prospects for children. The report’s development was enriched by a discussion with some 20 youth activists from all over the world.

The draft outlook was shared with various internal and external audiences, and inspired further analysis of some of the trends identified, such as climate finance, youth and social contracts, and digital governance. At the request of UNICEF’s Public Partnerships Division and as a follow-up to *Outlook 2022*, OGIP analyzed trends in Official Development Assistance and their potential impact for UNICEF. The report was the top downloaded item on OGIP’s website in 2021 and was profiled in Duncan Green’s influential FP2P blog.

Another prominent offering from OGIP’s intelligence function is our regular production of Deep Dives: internal briefs providing a rapid analysis of a trending issue and drawing out implications for UNICEF and children.

In 2021, we produced 22 Deep Dives, adding to a repository of knowledge for colleagues covering modern technology in armed conflict, online hate speech, sanctions, vaccination certificates, intellectual property rights and COVID-19, COVID and low-cost private schools, antimicrobial resistance, female leadership, sand and dust storms, subjective well-being, cryptocurrencies, leadership on climate, country income classifications, social contracts, COVID reforms, cyber-attacks, ranking UNICEF, vaccine counterfeiting and corruption, climate finance and children, reforming fossil fuel subsidies, military use of biometrics and rising global food prices.

In other work, OGIP produced an issue brief on the implications of COVID-19 for low-cost private schools (LCPS). The brief examined the scope of disruption in the LCPS market due to COVID-19; the impact on school operators, students and teachers; the spillover effects on public schools, as well as the underlying factors that affect the resilience of LCPS to shocks. Since its publication in March 2021, the issue brief has been referenced in publications by the World Bank, UNESCO, the Brookings Institution, the T20 Task Force on Global Health and COVID-19, the Government of India, the Global Schools Forum, the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the African Union International Centre for Girls’ and Women’s Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA), the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), the COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition, and in multiple academic and research journal publications and reports.

Working with the Oxford Internet Institute, OGIP also authored a report on mis/disinformation to both
understand the phenomenon and to explain how policymakers, civil society, tech companies and parents and caregivers can act to support children as they grow up in a digital world rife with mis/disinformation. The report was accompanied by an article on ‘10 things you need to know’.

Global Discourse | Outcome: Richer debate and awareness of child issues in the global discourse, in a way that ultimately uncovers improved solutions.

OGIP launched a State of the World Children’s report and the Changing Childhood Project, both with extensive collaboration within and outside UNICEF and provoking discourse at global and country levels – and with extensive implications for programming and advocacy.

State of the World’s Children 2021: On My Mind launched in October. Designed to underpin UNICEF’s Global Advocacy Priority around mental health, the report moved away from the idea that mental health, or ill health, is intrinsic to the individual. Rather, it drew attention to the risks and protective factors in the home, school and community that shape the experiences of children. It also noted the extent to which these factors can be adjusted and improved by good policies and practices that can be implemented by governments, community members and families. The report stressed the idea of mental health as a continuum, noting that throughout the course of their lives people move between states of better and poorer mental health. It called for greater openness, and efforts to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

The report was launched in Paris and at high-level satellite launches, including in the US, China, the EU, and the African Union. Stakeholders gave endorsements, including the World Health Organization, Save the Children, and United for Global Mental Health. The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health journal welcomed its redefining of mental health as “a positive human experience”.

Top-tier media mentions of the report were up more than 30 per cent, with UNICEF spokespeople featuring in interviews in the US, UK, Germany and other major media markets.

Downloads of the report were up 3,300 per cent, with 406,000 pageviews. At least 168 UNICEF offices activated on social media, and the campaign was amplified by leading entertainment and sporting figures. There were more than 30 million engagements on social media.

In November, OGIP unveiled the Changing Childhood Project (CCP): a UNICEF-Gallup collaboration exploring what it is like growing up and how generations see the world differently. Surveying over 21,000 people in 21 countries — both people 15-24 and people 40+ — we found that the young are optimistic, savvy, and impatient for change.

The project gained traction in top-tier global media; online via our interactive website, the first of its kind for UNICEF; and in participating countries, where it sparked debates via national convenings and on national TV.

For the first time, a UNICEF project earned exclusive coverage in The New York Times, appearing on the front page of its business section and including interviews with young participants, custom data graphics, and a sidebar on mental health. The project was also featured on the Times’ site for educators and students, including a live discussion and a post revealing more about the project. Activities and discussion questions, as well as hundreds of user comments, are available for free educational use.

CCP initiated large-scale mobilization efforts in 21 countries, engaging national media and national governments. In Japan, CCP served as an important evidence base for UNICEF and its partners, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, to promote the introduction of a basic law on children with a focus on child rights and participation. In Indonesia, CCP provided key content for a collaboration between UNICEF and partners, including the Ministry of Education, Culture,
Research and Technology.

In addition, participants at Davos referred to the CCP, and the Global Forum for Children and Youth built on the themes of the findings, mobilizing global leaders and receiving 158 commitments from 57 countries.

In August, OGIP produced a primer on child subjective well-being, a foundation for dialogue with leading researchers. Together with the Office of Research-Innocenti, OGIP is building on this for a global survey of young people. The outcomes will further an evidence-based discussion around key questions: Are children thriving? How do they feel about their lives? What do children value and how do they prioritize different aspects of their lives? Do children experience a sense of purpose and what are their aspirations for the future? And how do objective and subjective aspects of child well-being interact? The concept has already been discussed with partners within UNICEF, including in country offices and externally, and is generating significant interest.

**Frontier Issues | Outcome: Understanding of, and effective action on, frontier issues that directly affect child rights and wellbeing and frontier approaches to child advocacy/programming are accelerated.**

OGIP’s Frontiers function matured significantly over 2021. Our work was organized around a series of topics that OGIP identified as of strategic interest to UNICEF’s future programming.

**Data Governance:** Children and technology were at the centre of our work on promoting good governance of children’s data. A working group of 17 global experts produced a series of important analysis and insights on how the collection and use of data impacts children. That work culminated in the production of a manifesto, detailing the 10 ways we believe the world can maximize the benefits of data use for children while protecting them from harm. This work is pioneering, produced as governments around the world are increasingly establishing policies on data governance. The manifesto prompted much interest in the data protection and privacy community and among the tech companies, while MyDataGlobal – a consortium of 100 organisations and nearly 400 members – adopted it to guide their work.

**AI and Children:** 2021 saw a continuation of the AI for Children project, in partnership with the Government of Finland. In May, OGIP co-hosted a webinar with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the ITU, featuring young female advocates who stressed the need to promote gender equality and greater societal representation in the AI sector. The event enjoyed over 400 views from countries around the world. Stakeholders helped develop our global guidance on AI for children, a first for the UN and resulting in eight case studies from organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America, which pilot tested the guidance. These informed the next, non-draft version of the guidance, released in November, and inspired others to implement more child-centered AI. Along with UNICEF Finland, OGIP also organized a Global Forum on AI for Children: a first-of-its-kind event, it gathered some 450 participants from over 30 countries, including children’s rights and technology experts, policymakers, practitioners and researchers, as well as children active in the AI space. The project received much visibility thanks to a well-developed communications plan, including features in Tech Policy Press and the podcasts *The Lid is On* (part of UN News) and *Data Science Mixer*, and being presented as one of the keynotes at the 2021 Beijing AI Conference. We have also seen a significant uptick in interest in piloting the guidance from businesses and academia, and it has been formally adopted by Scotland as part of its national AI strategy.

**Climate mobility:** OGIP launched the Climate Mobility and Children Virtual Symposium summary report and accompanying background papers in June 2021, garnering much interest. Stemming from one of the recommendations during the symposium, work began on developing guiding principles for children on the move in the context of climate change. A small working group comprised of select symposium participants and newcomers, such as the United Nations University Center for Policy
Research, provided input into the initial drafts. Due to the potential for this product to have impact and influence beyond UNICEF and the working group, a broad consultation was organized to strengthen the principles and enable buy-in. This process is ongoing with the expectation that the principles will be launched in mid-2022.

**Personalized Learning:** In 2021, OGIP embarked on a landscape review of Personalized Learning in low- and middle-income countries. Phase A of the research was undertaken in 2021 although the report is to be published in 2022. In 2021, OGIP engaged with external organizations, such as the Edtech Hub, Gates Foundation, Jacobs Foundation, the Education Commission, Central Square Foundation, and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), through a reference group mechanism to seek inputs into the study design and draft report, and to identify and establish outreach with edtech products and vendors. The study team was also invited to discuss and preview emerging Phase A findings at the 2021 Education Alliance symposium and the Global Forum on AI for Children (a conference jointly hosted by UNICEF and the Government of Finland). The draft findings were already being used by the Edtech Hub and Jacobs Foundation to inform their work on personalized and adaptive learning.

**Digital learning for displaced youth:** Together with the Education Section in the Programme Division, OGIP led the development and coordination of the report *Unlocking the Power of Digital Technologies to Support ‘Learning to Earning’ for Displaced Youth*, which provided a rapid assessment of how digital technologies are being used to support youth’s transition from school to work in displaced and host communities, noteworthy practices and emerging lessons for design, policy coordination, financing, scaling and implementation of these solutions. A companion compendium of solutions was also produced, featuring promising solutions and their key design and implementation-related aspects. Finally, a webinar was organized jointly by OGIP and the Education Section to socialize learnings and recommendations from the report. The webinar was attended by more than 120 participants from 57 countries, representing organizations including MercyCorps, ILO, IFC, Generation Unlimited, the MasterCard Foundation, the Government of India, USAID, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNICEF regional and country offices and universities.

### Lessons Learned and Innovations

**A second year of remote work**

2021 was the second year of the pandemic, and thus another year of remote work – but also one of gradual return to the office. This demanded that we sustain new work modalities established at the start of the pandemic, manage remote work fatigue, and establish new hybrid methods as some colleagues returned. This gradual return helped to deepen relationships and trust among staff, many of whom had yet to meet one another in person. At OGIP, we met the need for regular adjustment of approaches based on changing circumstances, as well as testing different methods of working. This also meant taking into account the different risk profiles of colleagues and remaining fair and consistent in their treatment.

**Building an enabling culture**

At the start of 2021, OGIP ran a leadership retreat complemented by a programmatic level retreat to take stock of results from 2020, and to reflect on OGIP’s functions and build alignment on priorities for the year ahead. These two meetings were followed by an all-staff retreat where colleagues came together to celebrate the successes of 2020, connect through team building activities, and share plans for 2021. The retreat was designed to be participatory and fully online. Among other things, we agreed to put special attention during the year on sustaining our remote work, promoting sharing and learning across the team, risk taking, and increasing cross-unit communication.

OGIP has continued to host cross-unit brainstorms, and ideation sessions for its Monthly Highlights, encouraging collaborative approaches. This has been complemented by our bi-weekly all-staff meetings in which we have combined process, content, and team building elements. OGIP scored...
among the highest of all UNICEF’s offices and divisions in the first two Pulse surveys on office culture.

**Refining strong /agile processes: planning framework**

In 2021 we refined our Monthly Highlights planning to include an ideation phase that helped focus on the impact we want to have, identify audiences we want to reach and from there agree timebound deliverables. 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 2020 and, through learning by doing, have since strengthened it to enable more effective sequencing, and greater responsiveness to other parts of UNICEF and external partners.

**Digital platforms**

OGIP had bold ambitions for the communication of the Changing Childhood Project: to reach large numbers of young people across the world and enable them to engage deeply with the results. The key platform chosen for communication of the results was an interactive microsite which behaved like a mobile app and invited the users to “play” with the data and respond to and situate themselves within the global findings. This was created with a leading external partner and required cooperation from various parts of UNICEF: including ICTD, DGCA, and Legal.

The result was a truly unique digital product. Social media marketing drove much traffic to the site in its initial days, and a goal now is to get it into schools and museums. We also received many requests from within UNICEF for translations (10 to date, including many that are not official UN languages) and requests for country-specific websites (which was, sadly, beyond our capacity to deliver, but remains an ambition for future work).

**Working with and responding to the field**

Despite its global focus, OGIP has been keen to ensure relevance and usefulness to field offices. One way OGIP has worked with offices is through multi-country projects. The 2020 SOWC on mental health was produced with the active participation of Country offices and National Committees.

Compared to previous years, the response to a call for case study material was particularly strong, with over 45 Country Offices and National Committees responding to a call for content. There was also demand for regional briefings, from the European Union, the African Union and LACRO, all of which were fulfilled. The Changing Childhood Project, which was co-funded by Country Offices and National Committees, sought to provide rich data and communications materials for countries to help them spark national conversations about and among young people. The OGIP team developed country-specific analyses and communications materials and provided support to countries in their understanding and use of them via one-on-one exchanges, Country Office level webinars and a multi-country workshop. The team was also responsive to requests from countries for bespoke analyses, country-level data visualizations, translations of the immersive website and social media assets. The approach to working with countries was iterative – a cycle of offers and requests that helped maximize the uptake and impact of the material.

Deep Dives have proven to be a powerful platform for engaging with field. The response to Deep Dives helps OGIP determine the degree of interest in specific topics, as well as providing a signal to go deeper and a means through which we can respond to requests for analysis.