



## **STUDY REVEALS 21% RISE IN VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN WORLDWIDE: POLYCRISIS FOR CHILDREN DEEPENS DUE TO RISE IN CONFLICTS AND CONTINUED COVID-19 FALLOUT**

- This year's KidsRights Index Report reveals a 21% rise in serious violations of children's rights in situations of war and armed conflict around the world, including in locations such as Israel and Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan, with nearly 8,000 boys and girls killed in the Israel-Gaza conflict alone
- The world is still reeling from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic too, as rates of child immunisation in almost a third (32%) of countries in Western Europe have now declined
- Only one in three of the UN's child-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been met or are on track to be met by 2030, and only one in four children will live in countries where these SDGs will be met
- Climate change induced disasters and the related displacement of young people also continues to threaten children's rights around the world as countries struggle to mitigate the increasing risks involved

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2024:** The polycrisis impacting children's rights across the world is deepening as young people continue to suffer from a multitude of crises, according to the KidsRights Index Report 2024 released today, the only ranking that annually and systematically reviews the global state of children's rights worldwide.

This year's study has revealed there has been a 21% rise of serious children's rights violations in armed conflicts around the world, owing to conflicts in Israel and Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and many more countries across the globe. In Israel and Gaza alone, since October 2023 nearly 8,000 children have been killed. Reports also show that 1,957 children have been killed or injured in Ukraine since the escalation of war in the country in 2022.

Previously immunisation rates amongst children had been falling in the Global South due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. While this trend seems to be curbing, this year's KidsRights Index Report now shows that the continuing fallout of the pandemic has led to a reduction in immunisation rates amongst children in almost a third (32%) of countries in Western Europe too.

In addition, the 2024 KidsRights Index Report has identified that progress on the UN's 'Agenda 2030' and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relevant to children contained therein, is severely lagging. Only one in three of the UN's child-related SDG indicators have been met or are on track to

be met, meaning that only one in four children will live in countries where these will be eventually met.

Meanwhile, the ongoing impact of climate change induced disasters and the subsequent displacement of children continues to threaten young people's rights around the world. However, the KidsRights Index Report also points to positive and consistent efforts from nations such as Denmark and the United Kingdom to phase out fossil fuels and introduce climate change related policies and goals that will have positive short-term and long-term effects.

If the Climate Change domain is integrated into this year's results, the United Kingdom demonstrates the most improvement, climbing 52 places to 85<sup>th</sup> place, owing to the nation being on the right track to achieving 'net zero' by 2050.

This year's KidsRights Index report has also found that the rise of right-wing political leadership and resulting anti-migration sentiments across the globe are hindering the pursuit of children's rights in many locations.

Each mutually reinforcing issue is contributing to the prolonged mental health crisis among children and young people globally. The rise in armed conflicts around the world has heightened the risk of post-traumatic stress and other mental health conditions and disrupted the provision of basic protection and mental wellbeing services for children. The heritage of staying-at-home procedures used during the Covid-19 pandemic continues to have lasting effects as well.

Marc Dullaert, Founder and Chair at KidsRights, is now calling on Governments and relevant agencies across the world to face up to the stark reality that, by the present state of affairs, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals relating to children's rights are unlikely to be met:

“This year's report highlights the devastating impact that the deepening polycrisis has had on children and their rights by undermining decades of progress on the protection of the next generation across the world. In particular, it is abundantly clear that we are now unlikely to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals relating to children's rights.

Therefore, Governments and humanitarian agencies around the world should look long and hard in the mirror and face this reality head-on by creating new plans that ensure we tackle each issue to protect children and provide them with a bright future ahead.”

### **KidsRights Index Report 2024: Developments in the country rankings**

While the overall results of this year's data analyses paint a gloomy picture of children's rights across the world, Luxembourg has jumped three places in the rankings to achieve number one in this year's KidsRights Index Report when the Climate Change domain is excluded.

Notably, Sweden fell steeply from its previous first position to the 78<sup>th</sup> rank in 2024, despite having been consistently in the top ten since the very first KidsRights Index Report. The primary cause behind the country's poor result this year is its below par performance on Domain 5 of the Index on the 'enabling environment for children's rights'. This is due to a strict assessment by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which generated new Concluding Observations in 2023 and thus new scores on domain 5 in 2024.

The lowest scoring country in this year's report was Afghanistan. It replaced Chad which consistently was the lowest ranked country for the last four years.

As usual, all countries were evaluated across the same five Index Domains (Life, Health, Education, Protection and the Enabling Environment for Child Rights) and based on the same data sources.

### **The devastating impact of conflict across the world**

The year 2023 has witnessed an upsurge in prolonged armed conflicts globally, leading to an exponential increase in the instances and number of children directly and indirectly affected by war.

The latest annual United Nations report on 'children and armed conflict' recorded 30,705 grave violations of children's rights, impacting 22,557 children. This was an increase of 21% on figures from 2022. Such violations included the killing and maiming of children, as well as the recruitment and use of child soldiers, abduction, and the denial of humanitarian assistance.

In 2023 the world also witnessed as many as 1,650 attacks on schools and hospitals, placing children at a direct and grave risk of harm, despite the prohibition of targeting civilian infrastructure during armed conflicts. This is due to have lasting effects on the educational rights of young people, as well as, for instance, on the access to sexual and reproductive healthcare for children who suffered sexual violence or abuse in situations of armed conflict, for many years to come.

This year's report also draws attention to the disruption that armed conflict has had on children's families and the societies they live in, and the subsequent impact on the provision of basic protection and services for children and for their mental wellbeing.

In Sudan, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has found that 14 million children are in dire need of humanitarian support, 19 million are out of school and 4 million are now displaced. According to UNICEF, these figures make the situation in Sudan the largest child displacement crisis in the world.

In Gaza, forced displacement, hunger, the shortage of shelter, a lack of water and medical services as well as the destruction of schools is leading to unacceptable consequences for children too.

All the above, as well as the impact of traumatic events and forced displacement on children's mental health and wellbeing, means that the cascading effects of armed conflicts on children are likely to be felt for years to come.

### **An alarming fall in child immunisation**

This year's KidsRights Index Report highlights that Western Europe and the Middle East and North Africa are now showing the least progress on immunisation rates amongst children. Almost a third (32%) of countries in Western Europe recorded a decline, while over a quarter (25%) in the Middle East and North Africa did so too. While these falls are highly contextual in each country, this year's report points to an uptick in vaccine hesitancy, due to the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, and challenges stemming from conflicts, as well as economic instability, as potential reasons for such declines.

*KidsRights is an international non-governmental organisation that promotes the wellbeing of very vulnerable children across the world and advocates for the realisation of their rights. The KidsRights Index is produced in cooperation with Erasmus University Rotterdam (Erasmus School of Economics, and the International Institute of Social Studies). It sits alongside the Foundation's prestigious and acknowledged International Children's Peace Prize, endorsed by the Nobel Peace Laureates, whose recipients have included Malala Yousafzai.*

The KidsRights Index Report 2024 may be found here: [www.kidsrights.org](http://www.kidsrights.org).

**ENDS**

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### **Editor's Notes**

#### **About KidsRights**

KidsRights is an international non-governmental organisation that strives for a world where all children have access to their rights and are enabled to realise the great potential they carry within them. KidsRights sees children as changemakers with the power to move the world and facilitates them in voicing their opinions and taking action in order to bring about change. KidsRights supports children by commanding global attention for the realisation of children's rights and acting as a catalyst to ignite change, together with children and youth. KidsRights is the founder of the prestigious International Children's Peace Prize, the world's first borderless state 'State of Youth' and one of the organisations behind the annual, global KidsRights Index.

Please visit our website to find out more about KidsRights: [www.kidsrights.org](http://www.kidsrights.org)

#### **About Erasmus School of Economics**

Erasmus School of Economics is a leading centre for scientific research and education in economics and econometrics. The activities of this internationally acclaimed School of Erasmus University Rotterdam contribute to understanding current and future economic developments in the world and to answering questions related to the roles of government and business policy.

#### **About the International Institute of Social Studies**

The International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) is a graduate school of critical policy-oriented social science. Established in 1952, ISS focuses in particular on research, teaching and public service in the field of development studies and international cooperation. Its students, staff and knowledge partners are both from the Global South and the Global North. Interdisciplinarity and co-creation are among the key features of the work of the Institute. ISS is part of Erasmus University Rotterdam but based in The Hague.

The KidsRights Index has been published annually since 2013 and thus appears in its 11<sup>th</sup> edition this year. It is the first and only fully comparative worldwide annual index that systematically compares the child rights performance of (as of recent 194 or nearly all) countries that are bound by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.