

ALUMNI Network

Children's Rights in a Globalised World: Critical Perspectives

Update April 2017

Introduction

The international interdisciplinary course on children's rights, *Children's Rights in a Globalised World: Critical Perspectives*, takes place biannually as a joint initiative of Flemish university partnerships, in close cooperation with the Children's Rights Knowledge Centre (KeKi).¹ Targeting 'leaders of the future' in children's rights practice, policy and academia, the course trains participants to engage in a critical and strategic reflection on the integration of children's rights in their professional activities. In addition, participants are stimulated to pass on the knowledge and skills gained during the course in their own context through the 'train-the-trainers'-model.

Having hosted 40 participants in 2008, 42 in 2010 and 48 in 2012, 64 in 2014 and 31 in 2016, the course connects a world-wide network of 225 highly qualified children's rights professionals in 74 countries.² However, what happens to this invaluable resource of shared knowledge and expertise after the two intensive weeks in Belgium are over? How can the course organisers facilitate the opportunity for participants to continue to rely on and be involved with the network they are part of?

Seeking an answer to that recurrent question, KeKi decided to set up an alumni association. In order to get this started, all alumni were invited to fill out a questionnaire about their current professional activities, or, alternatively, share their story in a short email. In particular, participants were asked whether they had been able to put to practice the new insights and ideas gained during the course, whether they had set up or contributed to a similar children's rights training initiative in their home country, and/or whether they had collected new expertise in children's rights they wanted to share. The results of the 26 replies we received up until April 2017 are summarised below.

¹ As of 2012, the course has been imbedded in the International Training Programme Human Rights for Development (HR4DEV). See www.hr4dev.be and www.keki.be.

² Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Aruba, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bhutan, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Ethiopia, France, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Laos, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Malta, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, The Netherlands, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

OVERVIEW

Name	Edition	Current employment	Country of residence
Ansobi Loneli, Luc	2010	Peace Tree Network	Kenya
Cargill, Dwayne	2008	Office of Jamaican Cabinet	Jamaica
Chisholm, Suzanne	2008	Strategic Development Adviser, YMCA Wales	United Kingdom
Couzens, Meda	2008	Senior lecturer, School of law, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban	South Africa
Cyment, Paola	2014	Researcher at Centro de Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Nacional de Lanús; Programme Officer at Comisión de Apoyo a Migrantes y Refugiados	Argentina
De Goede, Irene	2012	Senior researcher at the NCDO, expertise and advisory centre on citizenship and international cooperation, focusing on children and adolescents	The Netherlands
De Vos, Kim	2008	Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Medecins Sans Frontieres	Greece
Dewallef, Lies	2012	NGO Development worker (cooperant) for Broederlijk Delen at RNDDH (Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains)	Haiti
Gedevanishvili, Maia	2008	Head of the Child's Rights Center, Office of the Public Defender	Georgia
Gebbru, Tadios Kebede	2012	Health Program Coordinator at a national NGO known as Hiwot Integrated Development Association (HIDA)	Ethiopia
Hansen, Søren Gade	2010	Chief Adviser, Børnerådet, The National Council for Children	Denmark
Harcourt, Deborah	2010	Asia Pacific Early Childhood Consultants	Australia
Khater, Mohammed	2010	Protection Coordinator – International Rescue Committee Country mission in Pakistan	Pakistan
La Rose, Nenita	2008	Executive Director of Child Helpline International (CHI)	Netherlands
Msemi, Msafiri	2012	Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG)	Tanzania
Norbu, Jangchuk	2010	Judge	Bhutan
Peter, Digna	2012	Women Centre for Communication and Development	Tanzania
Pina Juste, Silvia	2012	Until 2012: Focal person for Samoa and Northern Pacific Countries (Micronesia, Marshall and Palau) as a Child Protection Officer at UNICEF Pacific.	Spain
Phan Thi Kim, Lien	2012	Program unit Manager, Phu Tho program unit, Plan in Vietnam	Vietnam
Sabaa, Susan	2008	Executive Director, Child Research and Resource Centre	Ghana
Sargeant, Jonathon	2010	Lecturer in Education	Australia
Serrano Frattali, Juan Pablo	2010	Universidad Manuela Beltrán: Coordinator of Internationalization and Professor of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law President NGO Liderazgo para la Paz	Colombia
Silan, Edelweiss	2008	Independent consultant on children's rights	Thailand
Slavinskaya, Anna	2012	War Trauma Foundation (Amsterdam): Part-time involvement in the implementation of the project addressing psychosocial well-being of the children in the Caucasus. Student of Master Programme in Peace studies at International Christian University of Tokyo	Netherlands / Russia / Japan
Willemot, Yves	2010	Executive Director UNICEF Belgium	Belgium
XiaoJun, Tong	2012	Professor on the Faculty of School of Social Work of CYU, teaching Qualitative Research Methods, Practice of Social Work & Social Work with Children Deputy Director of CSWC in charge of the implementation of research programs, with personal research interest in child protection and child welfare in a RIGHT perspective	China

HR4DEV (2014)

Paola (Argentina) joined the HR4DEV programme in 2014. For her, the exchange with the rest of the participants was memorable, e.g. about the different realities they face in their respective fields of work. She learned a lot about issues that had been new to her, such as the critical approach to human rights, children and development issues as well as the multidisciplinary approach. She points out that Universidad Nacional de Lanús developed a good practice in the field of online pedagogical resources: a tool specifically designed for teachers to work in class on the issue of children's rights and migration. The link to this resource is: <http://valijainmigracion.educ.ar>.

HR4DEV (2012)

Anna (Russia), Digna (Tanzania), Irene (Netherlands), Lien (Vietnam), Lies (Belgium/Haiti), Msafiri (Tanzania), Silvia (Spain), Tadios (Ethiopia) and Tong (China) attended the course in 2012. Within less than a year's time, in one way or another the input they received in Belgium found a way to both their professional and their personal environment.

For **Anna**, the course deepened her knowledge about children's rights to the extent that she now feels confident in advanced professional debates on children's rights in the field of humanitarian action and development. She feels that the legal notions and regulations concerning children's rights positively influenced her ability to bring in weighty arguments for child protection to potential donors and to the general public. In addition, Anna stimulated a range of Russian NGOs working on juvenile justice to increase their professionalism by using the KeKi database.

Digna initiated a number of projects and training programmes in her district in Tanzania. She set up a working group on women and children's health rights to remind the government of their obligations regarding accessible and quality health care services for women and children. Despite its short history, the working group is already achieving concrete results (e.g. since November 2012, two dispensaries have been renovated and seen their medical staff increase from 1 to 3; also, the working group has been holding monthly meetings with local community service providers). In addition, Digna capacitated a children's council in three wards of the Handeni district. She reports that these children have since been invited to give ideas and comments in village planning meetings and dispensary committees, something that had always been thought of as impossible. Finally, Digna conveyed a three-days training on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and human rights based approaches (UNESCO perspective) to 32 participants from 15 Handeni NGOs. As such, the impact of the course is highly visible for her, not only in her organisation, but also in her community.

Irene gave a workshop on teaching children's rights during a training day for teachers. In addition, she gave a lecture on children's rights and is currently writing a report on 'ecological children's rights'. She is planning a workshop for her colleagues about the content of the course, as well as study on the opinions of Dutch children regarding children's rights in an international context.

Lien applied the knowledge she gained in Belgium in her work for Plan Vietnam, for instance through a reflection on development and human rights aspects in the projects and programmes she is involved with, so as to identify and try to fill in gaps in project design and implementation. In addition, she organised an internal seminar for her colleagues to pass on what she had learned. Lien also joined and took the lead in an initiative of organisational capacity assessment of child participation, aiming to promote child participation in Plan's projects and, later on, in their own community.

Also **Lies** has done extensive work in translating the principles from the course to the practice of her day-to-day working environment in Haiti. She organised two trainings about the importance of the human rights based approach in general, and two trainings on the human rights based approach to development in particular. With the trainings, she motivated a total of about 45 participants (including Broederlijk Delen staff, development workers, Norwegian church aid staff, staff of the Social Mission of Haitian Churches and programme/project managers, leaders etc. from the partner organisations of Broederlijk Delen and 11.11.11) to start using or continue to use the human rights based approach in their respective organisations. Moreover, Lies integrated the approach in the existing Broederlijk Delen HAP-trainings. In all trainings, she used a participatory methodology and implemented the 'train the trainers'-model. In order to guarantee that know-how is conserved in the future, Lies trained a colleague from her partner-organisation to independently be able to give this training as well. She recommends others who organise such trainings to use the websites http://www.unssc.org/web1/programmes/rcs/cca_undaf_training_material/teamrcs/show.asp (especially the folder on HRBA / RBM and the Power Walk as a participative exercise to start a HRBA-training adapted to the local situation) and <http://www.actionaidusa.org/publications/actionaids-human-rights-based-approach-hrba-resource-book>.

Msafiri Msedi, on his turn, has been selected to conduct a human rights training to local government leaders in Mwanza city and Kagera Region (Tanzania) in May 2013. In addition, upon his return after the course, he established the 'Tusaidiane Disabilities Resources and Charity Organisation', an NGO for people with disabilities. He reports that what he learned from his time in Belgium is that law is not everything: "that is to say not because we have law things can work, we can apply other practices." In this regard he refers to perspectives that were new to him before attending the course, such as the one offered by legal pluralism.

Silvia reports that one of the most important challenges faced by child protection practitioners in developing countries is the dearth of data on child protection issues (violence against children, child labour, child trafficking, children in conflict with the law, etc.) and systems (legal and policy frameworks, services, mandated bodies, etc.) that prevent and better protect children from abuse, violence and exploitation. As this was the case in the Pacific, UNICEF decided to undertake comprehensive research studies that would serve as evidence-based tools for advocacy and programming purposes in the Child Protection field. In her role as a Child Protection Officer covering the Northern Pacific Countries, she supported the coordination of the research in Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau which was mainly led by local teams from the ministries under which the child protection portfolio lies. She provided strategic planning advice in these countries by conducting research and analysis of legal, policy and regulatory frameworks; justice and social welfare services and traditional harmful practices.

Tadios' organization has a child care and development unit. He was able to organize series of different sessions in which he could share what he had acquired from the HR4DEV training programme to staff working in the child care and development programme. To do this, his organization assisted him by allocating the necessary facilities, budget and time. In addition, using the knowledge he gained from the HR4DEV training programme, Tadios was able to make a two hours presentation on children's rights for participants of a child right advocacy workshop organized by an NGO known as Forum on Street Children. Currently, he is liaising with child protection units at sub-city level to provide a five days training course on child rights for woreda level (i.e. the smallest governmental structure in Ethiopia) child protection officers. Tadios wants to encourage alumni, and especially those from third world countries, to involve the government in any effort they make to promote human/child rights so that their effort can have a long lasting impact.

Finally, **Tong Xiaojun** reports that she incorporated what she learned into her teaching of the course 'Social work with children', which she started at the China Youth University for Political Sciences 4 years ago. Second, she has been using the theory of 'Rights' in all her research and practice in social work with children, such as trainings/workshops for staff in orphanages, minor protection centers and communities; as well as in the research project 'Trafficking for forced labors' and the Model Project on 'Child welfare service delivery in rural China'. Thirdly, she proposed to her university to set up a centre similar to KeKi, which is currently under

consideration. Finally, she has been working on designing and setting up a 'train-the-trainers' workshop for social work faculties from all the programmes in the country within the system of All China Youth Federation (around 30 in total). Child rights is not an independent course, but a core component of the knowledge base of social workers working with children.

IICCR (2010)

Of the participants who attended in 2010, Deborah (Australia), Jangchuk (Bhutan), Jonathon (Australia), Juan Pablo (Colombia), Luc (Kenya), Mohammed (Sudan/Pakistan), Søren (Denmark) and Yves (Belgium) got back to us.

Deborah shared with us a very interesting resource on early childhood. She organizes courses, events, research projects and consultancy. All information about Deborah's business can be found on this link:

<https://www.asiapacificearlychildhoodconsultants.com/>.

Since Bhutan's transformation to a parliamentary democracy in 2008, **Jangchuk** sees his country gear towards adopting and implementing many of the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Children's Care and Protection Act, for example, for which he was a member of the drafting committee, was adopted in 2011. Jangchuk reports that he learned a lot in Belgium and that the training course keeps inspiring him in his day-to-day work as a judge.

Jonathon co-authored a book that focuses on researching with children from a children's rights perspective, entitled *Doing Ethical Research with Children* (London Open University Press, 2012). In addition, together with IICCR alumna **Deborah** Harcourt, he included children's rights as a separate module at the Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University (Victoria). Jonathon also reports that the masters programme on Early Childhood Education embedded children's rights across all units, and that children's rights now is a dedicated subject in the Education programme.

Juan Pablo tells us he has been implementing what he learned in the organisation he founded and presides, *Liderazgo para la Paz*, and in the academic field, in particular through his position as professor in Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law at the university of Manuela Beltran (Colombia).

Luc works for Peace Tree Network, an organization that aims at creating awareness on issues related to the promotion and protection of human rights in the post-conflict area of Mt Elgon, Western Kenya. Whereas he faces many challenges in reaching out to local communities (in which patriarchal structures and traditional practices such as FGM and the absence of education for girls are still the rule), Luc and his organization can now notice step-by-step improvements in the awareness and efforts towards realizing the best interests of the child in this area. In addition, the IICCR encouraged him to set up a peace education programme, as well as a local train-the-trainers project, using the human rights based approach as a starting point.

Mohammed reports how the course shaped his commitment towards the protection of children in conflict-affected areas. He has done research on child soldiering in Darfur and worked closely with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines to address concerns regarding the recruitment of children and the strengthening the local child protection mechanisms. In this context, he worked on mobilising local community-based human rights committees and trained them on various community-led protection approaches, including child protection. Currently, Mohammed manages a protection programme in Jalojai camp (Peshawar, Pakistan) and works on a PhD research proposal to study child soldiering and long-term human security, in particular what humanitarian intervention could do to rebuild the mental infrastructure of conflict affected communities.

For **Søren**, the course helped him to establish and maintain a platform for a CRC-based approach to children's rights in his daily work. For example, the Danish National Council for Children – for which Søren is the chief

advisor – adopted new methods inspired by Article 12 of the Convention. The CRC constitutes the solid fundament for all the Council’s activities.

Also for **Yves**, executive director of UNICEF Belgium, the course reinforced his references and capacities to advocate for children’s rights towards the target groups of his organisation, in particular the Belgian authorities. He encourages all alumni to “work continuously to reinforce their network of contacts in the field of children’s rights in their own country as well as in other countries.”

IICCR (2008)

Dwayne (Jamaica), Edelweiss (Thailand), Kim (Netherlands), Maia (Georgia), Meda (Romania/South Africa) Nenita (Netherlands), Susan (Ghana) and Suzanne (United Kingdom) participated in the course’s first edition in 2008.

Dwayne was able to use the course outline of IICCR to inform two tertiary institutions’ curriculum to infuse more child rights issues in their social work programme. He was also able to provide guidance in the development of a curriculum to train Children’s Officers at the government’s Child Development Agency, which is responsible for child issues. Besides, he teaches the course ‘Children and Youth: Present Value, Future Potential’ and is using the knowledge gained from the course in his teachings. Dwayne further developed the ideas he gained during the course to prepare two Annual Reports at the Office of the Children’s Advocate in Jamaica. Finally, he was privileged to write two articles for the Ministry of Education Annual Torch Magazine Publication.

Edelweiss worked for Save the Children on child protection and migration, exploring models of child protection systems, and helping develop Save the Children’s programming on children on the move. As she planned during the course, Edelweiss implemented a regional training on children’s rights and child protection. The input from the course was used, but adapted to her work environment and enriched with more creative learning methodologies, including partnering with a theater group. Afterwards, she left Save the Children to focus on consultancy work on children’s rights, such as developing a conceptual framework on child protection systems as a prevention methodology on child trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region; developing an advocacy framework addressing commercial sexual exploitation of children in South Asia; and writing for a journal linking human security and child trafficking. She is also supporting an international church-based organisation to develop a two-weeks training workshop on children’s rights and child protection for their leaders and workers in Asia.

Kim managed to get her former employer – the Dutch National Youth Council – to focus more on a child-rights based approach to youth work. In addition, she contributed to a report on children in asylum centres in the Netherlands and provided human rights education training for youth.

From 2008 to 2012, **Maia** coordinated a cooperation project between Norwegian and Georgian colleagues in children’s rights. This project originated in the formal course ‘Trauma Intervention and Treatment’, which took place in Norway in 2008, targeting 10 experienced Georgian psychologists in the aftermath of the armed conflict in Georgia. Upon returning home, the psychologists shared their knowledge by carrying out trainings (i.e. *train the trainers*) so as to enhance the capacity of the education sector to detect symptoms of stress and trauma, and to contribute to the psychological wellbeing of school students. Maia also developed course materials for teachers. By way of follow-up, Maia and her Georgian and Norwegian colleagues co-organised the conference ‘Child and War Trauma – Intervention and Treatment’ in 2010, for which a collection of articles was published. Recently, Maia changed jobs to become head of the Child Rights Centre at the Office of the Public Defender in Georgia.

Although **Meda** cannot directly point to one specific issue from the course that has influenced her thinking, she explains that the course has helped her in doing research, in the sense that it helped her to gradually develop her understanding of children’s rights and connected issues. She distributed materials gathered during the course

to her colleagues involved in teaching a master's programme in Child Care and Protection at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. When she attended the course, she was particularly interested in child participation. The most tangible results of this pursued interest are a journal article on child participation and public participation, published in last issue of the International Journal on Children's Rights in 2012, and a research report on children's councils and their work in Tanzania (REPOA report, 2011).

When **Nenita** started her job as the Executive Director of Child Helpline International (CHI) in Amsterdam, she felt the need for a more diverse theoretical background on children's rights. This is why she attended the IICCR, which she remembers as a great mix of plenary sessions, workshops, round tables and assignments. Today, she says the course was worth the hard work it took. She maintains contact with one of the speakers in particular in the context of her current employment. This year, CHI celebrates 10 years of setting up new child helplines, building capacity of the child helplines in the network, collecting data on the reasons for contact made with child helplines by children and young people, and undertaking evidence-based advocacy for strengthening child protection systems – thus advocating for better ways to protect all children.

Also **Susan** pursued the subject of child participation rights. Her organisation did a national case study on child participation in school governance and how it plays out for the girl child. Recommendations were captured for a one-year programme in school governance in Ghana. The Ghana Education Service wants the programme widened, so as to form the basis for a policy in child participation in school governance. Now, she has observed that the most challenging phase of child rights implementation globally is the convergence between policy and practice on the ground, with the few sustained successes being those that find a link with policy. In this regard, she identifies “a need for a practical theory of change plan towards the implementation of each and every thematic area of child rights, because these rights do not exist in isolation.”

Suzanne reports that what she learned during IICCR influenced her professional approach during her involvement with the Wales contribution to the UK State Party report before the UNCRC Committee in October 2008. Also, the course informed her approach to leading work in developing the Children and Young People's Rights (Wales) Measure in 2011, the first piece of UK legislation to place a duty on the (Welsh Government) Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC in carrying out their functions.

SHARED EXPERIENCES ACROSS EDITIONS

Being asked to look back at their participation in the course and identify what aspect thereof remains most memorable, most participants (11) refer to the opportunity to **share ideas and experiences** with colleagues from all over the world. Even though everyone has a different cultural, disciplinary and professional background, the fact that they were all interested in the same issues created a strong connection and invaluable opportunities for **networking**. All participants of the 2012-edition report to still be in touch with colleagues, mostly via Facebook, but also sporadically via email. One participant adds that these networks are useful to share the challenges and success stories of the course's implementation. Logically, contact between participants has diminished for participants of the 2010-edition, and almost disappeared entirely for those who reported back to us from 2008. It is our hope that the alumni network will play a role in reviving contact between participants across continents and across editions. Moreover, the course organisers will consider in which way email lists and social media like LinkedIn or Facebook can be used more fully to maintain contact within the network.

Six respondents referred to **specific parts of the programme content** they found particularly interesting, including the individual assignment, the interactive lectures, the sessions on minority rights, anthropology and legal pluralism (2012), the way in which the realisation of human rights and children's rights has an impact on (the right to) development (2012), the history of development (2012), the human rights based approach (2012), the session on child soldiering (2010) and the children's rights walk in Ghent (2008). Another participant particularly valued being able to widen her knowledge of legal instruments in the field of children's rights, in addition to gaining new perspectives on the strategies of advocacy and lobbying.

Seven participants remember the **course content as a whole**. One appreciated the fact that there was enough time during the course to really go in depth about children's rights, another the breadth of the issues looked at, and yet another looks back at the enhanced understanding of fundamental concepts of child rights and their global dimensions. Two people appreciated the ability to quickly establish a global, multidisciplinary perspective on the key children's rights issues from both the presenters and the participants. Two others refer specifically to added value of a multidisciplinary group of speakers, all of high professional standing. Also the richness of the reading materials was mentioned.

Two respondents expressed their appreciation for the **critical dimension of the course**, which they experienced as an opportunity to critically question their day-to-day work. One of them shared that "aspects of programming and planning that I took for granted were dismantled in a positive way, opening innovative windows for a more lasting and sustainable social change." The other finds the critical perspective to "reminded us that not all are converts when it comes to the rights children – I find that quite often we tend to discuss the rights of children in a bubble, in isolation from other social, economic, political problems. So most often we preach to the converts. The course tried to make us break the bubble, and I think the intentions are obvious in the new format of the course."

Last but not least, participants also remember having fun together, feeling safe and well in Belgium, and being grateful for the unique experience they shared. This observation highlights the importance of the course to, alongside facilitating the professional network, also contribute to a personal network of **friendship** across borders and disciplines.

Did you participate in any of the course's editions and would you like to share your story?

Please contact Sara via sara.lembrechts@keki.be, or join us in the [LinkedIn Group](#).

You may fill out the questionnaire below, or just email us.

The latest course report from the Critical Interdisciplinary Course on Children's Rights (CICCR)

can be found on our [website](#).

A short film about the 2010-edition can be found [here](#).



General information	
Name	
Country of origin	
Country of residence	
Contact details	
Current employment	
Previous employment in the field of children's rights	

In which year did you participate in the International Interdisciplinary Course on Children's Rights in Belgium?

If you look back at your participation in the course programme now, what is most memorable for you?

How did the course influence your professional activities in children's rights?

For example:

- *Were you able to implement the things you learned during the course in your own organization, teaching, network or other activities? How did you do that?*
- *Have you published or distributed any children's rights related articles or reports in which you could further develop ideas you gained during the course?*
- *Have you set up a training course yourself, or have you initiated any other projects where the 'train-the-trainers' model was implemented? How was that?*

Do you have any tips, tricks or good practices you would like to share with other alumni?

Have you been in touch, personally or professionally, with colleagues you met during the course? If so, how?

Other suggestions, remarks, thoughts?