



Investing in Children The Key to Prosperity

High Level Conference organized by the Icelandic Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Icelandic Ministry of Education and Children and the Council of Europe in Reykjavík **30 March 2023**
9:00–16:00.

Programme

- 9:00 Welcoming remarks
Mr Ásmundur Einar Daðason, Minister of Education and Children of Iceland
- 9:20 Introduction by Conference Moderator
Ms Regína Jensdóttir, Head of the Children's Rights Division and Council of Europe Coordinator for the Rights of the Child
- 9:30 The Case for Investing in Children
Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children
- 9:40 Interactive Conversation between the Minister of Education and Children, Ásmundur Einar Daðason and Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid about their new collaboration to develop methodology to evaluate investment in child rights and supporting governments in its implementation
- 10:00 Children's Prosperity in Iceland
Ólöf Ásta Farestveit, Executive Director of The National Agency for Children and Families and Silja Stefánsdóttir, Legal Advisor, Ministry of Education and Children
- 10:30 Economic impact of implementing the Prosperity Legislation in Iceland
Hrafnkell Hjörleifsson, Senior Advisor and Economist, Ministry of Education and Children
- 10:50 Coffee Break
- 11:10–15:50 Thematic Session: Monitoring Child Wellbeing and Exploring the Investment Case for Early Support
 - 11:10 Investing in Upstream Strategies to Enhance Child Well-Being
Ramesh Raghavan M.D., PhD., NYU Silver School of Social Work
 - 11:35 The Human Rights Approach to ending the Causes and Costs of Child Trauma
Benjamin Perks, Head of Advocacy and Campaigns, UNICEF
 - 12:15 Lunch
 - 13:45 Dashboard for Child Well-being in Iceland
Hjördis Eva Þórðardóttir, Team Leader of Child Rights, Ministry of Education and Children
 - 14:05 Why Invest in us?
Maya, Mirra and Arnar, Child Advisors to the Ministry of Education and Children
 - 14:25 The Economic Dimension of the Realization of Human Rights for all
Morten Kjærsum, Adj. Professor and Head of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law
 - 14:55 Panel Discussion with Keynote Speakers
 - 15:30 Closing
- 15:50 Reception hosted by the Icelandic Presidency



Background

In 2021 the Icelandic Parliament passed the Act on the integration of services in the interest of children's prosperity (the Prosperity Act). The Prosperity Act entered into force on 1 January 2022 and will be in a formal implementation phase for the next three to five years.

The Prosperity Act is the heart of comprehensive changes implemented by the Icelandic government in the last years to further the rights of the child and increase the prosperity of children in Iceland. According to the Act all service providers are obliged to collaborate in a more integrated way than before, with the principal aim of ensuring that children requiring integrated services, along with their caregivers, get appropriate and unhindered access to the support they need. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child serves as the foundation of the legislation together with Council of Europe child rights standards and strategies.

The Prosperity Act calls for a substantial increase in the government's investment in services for children and families. To provide an evidence base for the investment, a comprehensive monetary and economic evaluation was conducted. The results generated a paradigm shift within the Government of Iceland, a shift from looking at expenditure concerning children's wellbeing and prosperity as a cost towards looking at it as an investment. The evaluation showed that increased investment in the integration of services and early support for children in Iceland would have substantial positive effects on the state budget, with a projection to give a 9,6% p.a. return. It is projected to yield more returns than most large-scale investments made by the government, be it innovation or creating a large-scale dam for electricity production. These results are a welcomed addition to the obvious positive effects the investment is likely to have on the lives of children and families, increasing their wellbeing and overall prosperity and the rights of the child according to the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These results are further supported by a number of emerging research including a global study undertaken by the Office of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children and key partners, indicating that the economic and social costs of not providing necessary services to children in need could be as high as 8% of the global GDP; studies at the national level across a range of countries have found that the cost could be up to 5% of GDP.

Following this paradigm shift, the Government of Iceland has put a strong emphasis on conducting further economic evaluation simultaneously as it has developed key indicators for child wellbeing through a dashboard published annually. Throughout this work the Government has strived towards creating partnerships with other governments, NGO's and interested parties with the objective to develop the conversation and evidence base around the economic and social benefits of investing in the wellbeing and prosperity of children.

This Conference has the aim of broadening this cooperation by inviting member states of the Council of Europe to take part in the conversation around this emerging topic to explore various approaches towards the creation of a framework of analysis of the social cost of failing to support children's wellbeing and prosperity.

Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid

On 30 May 2019, the Secretary-General appointed Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid (Morocco) as his Special Representative on Violence against Children. Dr. Maalla M'jid took up her position on 1 July 2019.

Dr. M'jid, a medical doctor in paediatrics, has over the last three decades devoted her life to the promotion and protection of children's rights. She was Head of the Paediatric Department and Director of the Hay Hassani Mother-Child hospital in Casablanca.

Dr. M'jid was a member of the Moroccan National Council on Human Rights and founder of the non-governmental organization Bayti, the first programme addressing the situation of children living and working in the streets of Morocco.

From 2008 to 2014, she served as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Dr. M'jid also worked as an Expert-Consultant for national and international projects, strategies and policies relating to child rights' promotion and protection.

She has vast experience in the development of national policies on the protection of the child and has worked with several governments, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations.

She also worked as a lecturer in Moroccan and international universities on child rights' protection, promotion, programming and monitoring, as well as social and development policies. A member of several regional and international non-governmental organizations and networks working for children's rights, Dr. M'jid was also involved in the training of social workers, law enforcement, teachers, judges and medical staff.

Dr. M'jid holds a Doctorate in general medicine from the University of Rabat, a specialization in paediatrics and neonatology from the University of Bordeaux II and a Master's of Human Rights from the Human Rights Institute, Geneva. She is the recipient of numerous awards and honours for her strong commitment to protecting the rights of the child.



Mr. Benjamin Perks

Benjamin Perks is the Head of Campaigns and Advocacy in the Division of Global Communications and Advocacy at the United Nations Children's Fund, based in New York. He leads campaigns and advocacy on issues related to the survival, development and protection of children. He is a member of the Policy Advisory Group on the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and serves on a number of other bodies.

He previously served in human rights diplomacy roles as the UNICEF Representative and UN Resident Coordinator ad interim to both the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Montenegro. In both capacities he advocated for reforms to fulfill international human rights commitments and realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

He has also served in Georgia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, India and Albania. In Afghanistan he helped to coordinate the Back to School campaign in the Northern part of the country which brought 3 million children, including 1 million girls, into school-most of them for the first times in their lives. In his term he was overseeing demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of child soldiers.

In personal capacity, he is Senior Fellow at the Jubilee Centre at the University of Birmingham in the UK, which researches education policy on character, social and emotional development of children. He is recognized as a public speaker, blogger and influencer on violence against children and adverse childhood experiences. His book Attachment Revolution will be published in late 2024. His TedX talk on Adverse Childhood Experiences can be found [here](#). Ben can be followed on [twitter](#) and his [blogger](#).



Dr. Ramesh Raghavan

Ramesh Raghavan is a Professor at the Silver School of Social Work at New York University in New York, NY.

Before coming to New York University, he was on the faculties of Rutgers University (where he served as Associate Dean for Research) and Washington University in St. Louis. His prior appointment was as policy director for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network at its National Center co-housed at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Duke University.

Dr Raghavan conducts mental health services research on the needs of vulnerable children, with a specific interest in children in the child welfare system. Dr Raghavan has conducted studies on Medicaid managed care (funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality [AHRQ]), and on the effects of health insurance instability on mental health service use (funded by the Administration for Children and Families). He has conducted several studies on quality of care, including on the use of public finance mechanisms to promote quality of mental health services (funded by the NIMH), racial/ethnic disparities in Medicaid-funded mental health expenditures for children with histories of maltreatment (funded by NIMH), and on the development of novel risk adjustment mechanisms to better insure the mental health needs of children with emotional disorders (funded by AHRQ). His current work is on the economics of implementation (funded by NIMH), and on enhancing quality of care for children with disabilities who receive Medicaid-funded services.

Dr Raghavan is the former chair of NIMH's Mental Health Services Research review committee (SERV) and serves on the editorial board of Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research. In early 2015, he served as Senior Advisor in the Office of the Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families in the US Department of Health and Human Services, primarily working on the Obama Administration's psychotropic medication use and childhood trauma initiatives.

Dr Raghavan completed medical school at Stanley Medical College, Madras, India, and a psychiatric residency at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, India, before coming to UCLA. He completed a fellowship in pediatric pain management in the Department of Pediatrics at the David Geffen School of Medicine. He then worked at the UCLA/RAND Center for Adolescent Health Promotion, a joint center between UCLA and the RAND Corporation that undertakes research and policy analysis on issues related to child and adolescent health. He earned a PhD in health services from the Fielding School of Public Health at UCLA.



Adj. Professor Morten Kjærum

Since April 2015, Morten Kjærum is the Director of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (RWI) in Sweden. RWI is a leading hub for inter-disciplinary and policy-oriented human rights research and education with 40 years of experience advancing human rights in partnership with relevant partners. Before joining RWI, he was from 2008-15 the first director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in Vienna. The agency's task is to provide independent, evidence-based advice on fundamental rights to the EU institutions. From 1991-2008 Mr Kjaerum held the position as Executive Director at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, the Danish National Human Rights Institution.

He was member of the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) from 2002-2008.

Mr Kjaerum serves and has served on numerous Boards, among others he was chair of the International Coordination Committee for National Human Rights Institutions and chaired the group of Directors of EU Agencies. Currently, appointed by the UN Secretary General he serves as member of the UN Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation (VFTC) in the Field of Human Rights and of the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review.

Mr Kjaerum was in 2013 appointed adjunct professor at the University of Aalborg, Denmark. He has written extensively on human rights issues and most recently co-edited the books: Human Rights and Poverty, Edward Elgar Publisher (March 2021) and Covid and Human Rights, Routledge (May 2021).

In August 2008, Kjærum received a prize from the Danish National Association for Gays and Lesbians for promoting the rights of gays and lesbians. In 2015 he received the Grand Decoration of Honor in Gold with Star from the President of the Republic of Austria.

