

# Call for Papers

## In/visibility: The Global System of Protection for Young People 'under the radar'

### Editors:

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### Background

Children are often made invisible in the research, data and evidence that shapes policies, programs and practices of development. This is particularly true of children who are marginalized in additional ways – as migrants or refugees; as children left behind; those living on the street or in institutions; those with disabilities, those who marry young, or those who work. Their invisibility in data is mirrored by the limited understanding and inclusion by many scholars and policy makers of the child's perspectives or subjective experiences.

At critical moments, such gaps in data and understanding become particularly significant – they prevent adequate responses to meet the needs, address the vulnerabilities, or protect the rights of less visible children. The impacts on such children may be unseen and their long-term consequences ignored. This has been all too obvious in recent years as evidenced, for example, in the responses to child migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in all parts of the world. The Covid-19 pandemic may be another such moment.

At these times, all systems for the protection and welfare of vulnerable populations come under enormous stress. Pressures are intensified in contexts where populations with limited incomes or access to basic sanitation and health care are crowded together in slums or camps, spread out along migration routes, isolated in remote rural areas or at risk in dangerous worksites. Children are always found in such settings. Schools should be a place of safety and protection but do not always afford these opportunities. Young people without families, schools, education or jobs lack access to support or essential services and are at heightened risk of exploitation.

The global system for the protection of children inevitably comes under additional critical scrutiny at such times. 30 years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the arrangements in place to protect children at risk of harm or violence and to guarantee their rights may be at a critical juncture. On the one hand, commitments have been strengthened in recent years with the integration of relevant targets into the Sustainable Development Goals, along with agreements such as the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees. Through stronger champions and advocates, better data, and the ability to monitor change,

such steps may lead to some progress towards achieving the goals for children outlined in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. (UNICEF 2018)

On the other hand, the global security, development and humanitarian landscapes are increasingly disruptive and complex, altering the environment for millions of children today. The number of political conflicts has increased; every seven minutes it is estimated an adolescent is killed due to violence, and almost one in five homicide victims worldwide is a child – an estimated 70 per cent of whom are adolescent boys (UNICEF, 2017). Environmental and climate related disasters increasingly drive displacement. Over 650 million children under the age of 16 are made invisible through lack of a birth certificate or identification that might give them access to basic services and underpin their rights. The number of children in migration flows, in refugee camps, lacking access to immunization or health care, shows the world yet again the need for better protection mechanisms and for policies and advocacy for children and young people that are rooted in good research and data.

Every child deserves to be protected, and to enjoy the full range of rights to which she or he is entitled. And yet, our knowledge concerning children's experiences and perspectives is often limited by their invisibility. At the same time, the same children may become hyper-visible at certain moments, their images and experiences used as part of a larger political project. The case of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi is one example: Images of his body washed up on a beach in Turkey in September 2015 sparked public outcry and turned the world's attention albeit temporarily to Europe's migration dilemmas involving children. Less attention is paid to other – equally tragic or desperate experiences. Indeed, categories concerning protection – and that establish whose lives do not even merit being accounted for (Pickering and Cochrane, 2013)—continue to hinder our ability to understand and fully address the needs of children and young people.

Yet invisibility can also give young people space and propel them towards personal projects that allow them to fulfill their goals. Despite the barriers that prevent them from accessing adequate protection and care, education, health services or employment, many refugee children across Europe choose to disappear from reception centers or shelters (Humphris and Sigona, 2016). Young people walk out of protection systems when unable to obtain legal status in time or access resettlement and family union procedures. Notwithstanding the risks these actions pose to their individual safety, including exposure to exploitation and abuse, young people have legitimate reasons to take actions to fulfill their life projects and those of their families. Our ability to support them depends in turn on improved data and understanding of their aspirations and the pressures they face.

While the protection of all girls and boys is a core component of programming by organisations such as UNICEF and child-focused NGOs, this task requires the collection and analysis of quality data and evidence. Research can dispel myths and anxieties surrounding young people -- particularly those around children whose experiences have been systematically sidelined or purposely excluded from the protection agenda -- and can lead to the development of more effective protection strategies. Empirical, mixed-methods research and data that are intersectional, child-, gender- and culture- sensitive and that recognize young people's experiences as legitimate forms of knowledge can reduce the

significant gap on the scholarship on children, while exposing the structural contexts leading to their in/visibility.

### **Invitation to submit abstract**

With this background in mind, we invite scholars and practitioners whose work explores child protection dynamics to submit abstracts not to exceed 300 words concerning empirically-based research on the theme of **in/visibility** for possible inclusion in a special issue of a Journal or Edited Volume.

While we are actively seeking out submissions with co-authorship, we are also open to individual submissions. We encourage diverse and critical approaches to conceptualizing in/visibility, along with empirical work combining strengths across geographies, as well as across disciplines and specializations. Early career, female, non-gender conforming, and global-south scholars are specially encouraged to apply. Abstracts should be intersectional in nature, and rely on child-sensitive methods and approaches. Work that draws from primary research, participatory methods and/or which incorporates young people as co-authors and contributors will be particularly welcome. Any ethical issues and approvals should be noted.

A primary goal for this volume is to provide evidence and debate that illustrates and problematizes the continued in/visibility of children and young people, as well as to demonstrate in what ways these insights can fill gaps that other approaches neglect.

The following are some possible areas of in/visibility for consideration. These categories are not discrete or exclusive. We encourage and expect work where multiple conditions/ identities/ experiences intersect and/or collide. Authors are welcome to contact the editorial team concerning potential themes in anticipation of submitting their abstract.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forced return/deportation</li><li>• Statelessness</li><li>• Migration &amp; Children 'left-behind'</li><li>• Smuggling, trafficking</li><li>• Disability</li><li>• Indigenous/Aboriginal populations, ethnic minority/caste</li><li>• Sexuality and sexual violence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Detention and criminalization</li><li>• Gangs</li><li>• Internally displaced persons</li><li>• Child work/labour practices</li><li>• Street children</li><li>• Conflict/war</li><li>• Intimacy/spirituality</li><li>• Married children and parenthood</li></ul>
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### **Expression of Interest**

Please send your expression of interest, a working title and abstract (max 300 words), and direct any questions to the editors: [s.cook@unsw.edu.au](mailto:s.cook@unsw.edu.au), [bina.dcosta@anu.edu.au](mailto:bina.dcosta@anu.edu.au), [gabriella.sanchez@eui.eu](mailto:gabriella.sanchez@eui.eu), preferably by 15 July, 2020.

## The way forward

We will begin by conducting preliminary *literature reviews*, which will inform the development of the chapter drafts identifying relevant themes and connecting it to concepts of *in/visibility*. These themes will form the basis for a series of *blog posts* (jointly hosted by the ANU and UNSW) also involving the contributors. The purpose of these blog posts will be to provide a general overview of the book manuscript project and to gather feedback.

We will organise one workshop in early 2021 (Location TBC) with the contributors, along with other experts, practitioners and policy makers. The selection of contributors and workshop participants will focus on those with expertise on child protection and/or their positions in the UN, academia, human rights systems and governments. Selected contributors will be invited to the workshop to present and receive feedback on their draft manuscripts. If necessary due to travel restrictions, an initial workshop may be held on-line.

## References

Humphris, R., & Sigona, N. (2016). Mapping unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England. *Becoming Adult Research Brief*, No. 1, London: UCL

Pickering, S., & Cochrane, B. (2013). 'Irregular border-crossing deaths and gender: Where, how and why women die crossing borders'. *Theoretical Criminology*, 17(1), 27-48.

UNICEF (2017). *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF New York, November 2017.

UNICEF (2018). *A Call to Action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data*, UNICEF New York, February 2018

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