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UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and Communities Initiative



The Child-Friendly City Initiative in France

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Methodological note

The case-study follows methodological guidelines developed as part of the CFCI Toolkit Development project. Country selection for case-studies resulted from a call for expression of interest addressed to all National Committees carrying out CFCI and attention to documenting a diversity of experiences in order to inform the CFCI Toolkit.

The visit took place in February 2016 in two cities, Aubergenville and Colomiers, with different characteristics, approaches, socio-economic conditions, and political majority. Main criteria for the selection included: size, geographic location, accessibility with public transportation, and commitment by municipal staff to ensure adequate preparation for the visit.

A large range of actors and services were visited, including various neighbourhoods, audiences, age range and function. Wherever possible, municipal staff was asked to leave the team alone with actors to be interviewed, in particular when interviewing children and parents. For interviews with local UNICEF volunteers, National Committee staff also stepped out.

The visit was often perceived as a form of audit or evaluation. As a consequence, municipalities had set out to show what works rather than what does not. Interviewing children, parents and civil society mitigated the problem by giving various perspectives. The researcher being a country national, exploring issues in informal conversations and observing interactions among people also helped address the bias.

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Executive Summary

The Child Friendly City Initiative in France is one of the oldest and most extensive programmes under the UNICEF initiative. Initiated in 2002 under a partnership between UNICEF's National Committee and the Association of France's Mayors (AMF), as of August 2016 it gathers 208 cities. The accreditation process largely builds on self-assessment by municipalities of their interventions. The 'title' is granted for the electoral term. The current CFCI framework comprises 10 key thematic areas reflecting provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The partnership with UNICEF involves the identification of 3 priority areas out of these and an annual joint action plan. CFCI management involve two full-time staff members. The initiative is funded through the National Committee's own resources and a membership fee for participating cities. The National Committee also builds on an extensive network of volunteers operating at the local level and directly interacting with cities. However, various levels of skills and engagement by volunteers, combined with the large number of cities involved, mean that the National Committee cannot provide individual support but rather focuses on facilitating a national network through an annual conference, regular communications and production of tools. Strengthening local level engagement is key to ensuring adequate support and networking opportunities for municipal staff and officials working on CFCI.

Child participation is one of the key thematic areas of the CFCI framework. Municipalities participating in the initiative have typically set up a child municipal council. These councils usually operate on a similar model but show significant diversity in terms of quality of child participation and impact city-wide. In cities visited, quality child participation mostly takes place at the structure level in daily professional practices. Equity and non-discrimination, also a thematic area under the CFCI framework, is the focus of numerous city interventions with a diversity of approaches, backed by existing national policies. Often, the city does not perceive many of its interesting initiatives as related to CFCI due to limited understanding of the far-reaching scope of the framework, beyond the partnership with UNICEF and special events. Capacity-building on CFCI with local actors would help enhance CFCI impact in cities, improve accreditation, and enable the National Committee better identify good practices.

Partnerships with civil society and the business sector remain limited in the context of CFCI. Beyond its involvement at city level in providing a number of services to citizens, civil society could be further included in CFCI management and invited to share perspectives.

Monitoring and evaluation primarily lies in self-assessment by municipalities. Closer involvement by the National Committee could create an ambiguous situation, if it also technically supports cities. Attribution of a given outcome – to CFCI or to unrelated policy choices – is particularly complex. However, informants have repeatedly underlined how CFCI gives meaning to daily interventions for and with children, helps motivate staff at all levels across functions and structures, and sets a shared vision across the city.

1. Development of CFCI in the country

The Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) in France is one of the oldest and most extensive programmes under the UNICEF initiative. It started in 2002, building on a partnership between UNICEF and the Association of France's Mayors (AMF), which regroups 36,000 mayors from virtually all municipalities in France. In 2003, an application process was established and a communications campaign launched. In 2004, a network was created and a dedicated website put up. The following years saw the adoption of a common framework based on the 9 building blocks of the international CFCI framework and an action plan to guide municipalities. The initiative expanded to departments, the administrative level right above municipalities. In 2002, 12 cities adhered to the initiative, while in 2003 the number had grown to 32 and reached 264 cities and 4 departments in 2013. For the 2014 municipal elections, the National Committee reviewed the accreditation process and changed the 9 building blocks to 10 key thematic areas. Today, the initiative gathers 208 cities.

Brief overview of the two cities visited

Aubergenville is located in the department of the Yvelines, 40 km west of Paris. The town has approximately 12,000 inhabitants. There have been a number of political changes in the past decades. Political majority is currently held by the right wing liberal political party (Les Républicains). The city is divided into two main areas separated by a highway and joined by a bridge. Schematically, one side mainly has small villas where better-off families live. The other includes the old town ('le bourg') and an urban housing project located uphill ('le plateau'). The city developed with the car-making Renault factory, which built the housing project for its workers in the 1960s, but has significantly downsized since then. The housing project area is known to be poorer and more disadvantaged. The government has lifted the city's status as a 'priority urban area' just this year, a sign of improving conditions. Yet it implies that public funding from this programme has stopped coming in, affecting a number of support initiatives for the most disadvantaged.

Colomiers is located in the South of France, bordering Toulouse. It has approximately 37,000 inhabitants. Demographic growth has been exponential and continues to accelerate due to the region's attractiveness as one of France's most dynamic economic areas. Beyond a couple of old streets, the city is entirely new. A left-wing political majority has been ruling the municipality since the end of World War II. The city is home to France's major thriving aeronautic industry, with Airbus' headquarters, and a corresponding host of subcontractors, located there. This ensures major revenues from company taxes. Although the population is in the poorer range and several neighborhoods are classified as 'urban priority areas', the city's budget is considered high. While some areas are better off than others, many have described the city as socially diverse across its territory.

2. Management of CFCI

Management of the initiative within the National Committee

CFCI management in France is located under the National Committee's larger programme on partnerships, civil and youth engagement. It benefits from dedicated staff, who are in charge of building partnerships, communicating around the initiative, producing guidance tools, and making the network vibrant. It is overall well-resourced, even considering the breadth of the programme. Within the National Committee, two project officers work on a full-time basis on CFCI. One is primarily in charge of communications and manages the website; the other mainly acts as the network facilitator. In addition, a programme assistant supports the project on a part-time basis, in particular by providing administrative review of applications' submissions. A programme manager oversees this area of work under a wider portfolio.

The initiative is entirely financed through the income it generates and the National Committee's engagement. It receives no external funding. Since 2014, participating cities have been required to pay an annual fee of 200 euros – regardless of their size. In return, they receive tools and access to a nationwide network.

In terms of staff and resources, there is therefore commitment by the National Committee to ensuring the functioning of the initiative. However, given the breadth of the initiative, engagement with each city and individualized support is necessarily limited.

The National Committee further builds on an extensive network of volunteers working at the local level and organized around Departmental Committees (CD). As their name indicates, these committees operate at the administrative level of the department. They are responsible for following up with cities on the submission of their application and the signature of the partnership contract with UNICEF. The National Committee has requested each CD to designate a focal point for CFCI, which role mainly consists in sustaining momentum for the submission of cities' applications, ensuring the good flow of the process, and supporting the signature ceremony. It does not include providing substantive advice to cities or to the National Committee on the application itself or on the implementation of the CFCI framework in specific cities.

In order to run a major programme in a large country, UNICEF's engagement at the local level is critical. Yet while their role is essential, reliance on volunteers presents some challenges.

UNICEF volunteers at the local level have expressed concern at lack of clarity on their function in relation to CFCI. They are requested to lobby municipalities and support them in their application process, but are eager to be consulted on accreditation decisions, as they feel they know how things happen on the ground. On another level, they are also uncertain on ways to provide support to cities once accredited. In some instances, involvement focuses on participation in one-off events, giving visibility to UNICEF's brand. Another type of engagement consists in conducting child rights education sessions in local schools. Yet substantive support on CFCI per se is limited. As volunteers acknowledge, many lack skills in an area requiring technical knowledge of governance and policy work. They also often lack the local interpersonal connections needed to be heard.

The role of Departmental Committees (CDs) vis-à-vis cities and the National Committee would also require clarification. Some of their functions include interacting with cities, in particular for the accreditation process and fundraising events. However, the National Committee also directly interacts with cities in the context of CFCI. It copies the CDs in all exchanges, but the latter feel they should at a minimum be given a heads-up and actually be responsible for interacting with municipalities. This would help them establish their legitimacy and credibility with municipal counterparts and become the "go-to" person for all interactions with UNICEF. This issue is part of a difficult equation. Because CDs' capacities greatly vary across the territory, applying one model for all would bear significant risks in areas where the CD is less engaged. At the same time CFCI clearly operates on the basis of a partnership with UNICEF and its success relies on making this partnership a living instrument.

Both cities and UNICEF volunteers tend to perceive significant distance with the National Committee and would favour a closer engagement. They see CFCI management from the National Committee as remote and disconnected from their realities. From the cities' perspective, the National Committee appears as a remote office, largely bureaucratic and focused on accreditation, rather than supporting cities on a daily basis. Here, an important difference exists depending on the Departmental Committee's engagement. In places where the CD is very active, this issue is less pregnant from the city's perspective. Beyond the CD itself, engagement also depends on whether volunteers live in or near cities concerned and are able to have frequent contacts with municipal officials. When this is not the case, the municipality may feel isolated and not part of a larger movement.

While significant differences could be seen between a city where the CD is highly engaged and one where the CD is more remote, causality is not obvious. It rather seems that childhood policies are able to aggregate actors in cases where political support creates momentum and traction around a common project, but less so in others. However, where political support is lacking and no momentum is created, lack of a strong UNICEF presence makes it even more difficult for municipal staff to access any sort of support.

The recent appointment of liaison officers between the National Committee and Departmental Committees is likely to significantly ease communications and systematize interactions. These officers have been appointed as the result of a broader review on the relationship between central and local level and would therefore cover all issues under UNICEF's mandate, not only CFCI. This presents a further opportunity to build synergies between CFCI and other areas of work. The initiative by the National Committee to conduct trainings in 2016 for volunteers who act as CFCI focal points is a major positive step to build local capacities and promote a shared vision.

Within the National Committee, bridges between the CFCI programme and other National Committee programmes and functions could be further strengthened in order to build on synergies. CFCI gives significant visibility to UNICEF at the local level. City plates on roads at the entrance(s) of each accredited CFC have the UNICEF logo together with the CFCI logo. However, CFCI is little perceived as a fundraising tool, and has often been considered a stand-alone project within the National Committee's broader mandate. Work by the National Committee at the national level is divided between a 'childhood in France' section focusing on policy advocacy at the national level and a section focusing on various forms of grassroots engagement, including youth participation, child rights education and CFCI. Fundraising is yet another area, managed separately. Better integration between the fundraising function and the local prominence CFCI gives to UNICEF could be highly valuable to both programmes. It would support UNICEF's visibility across the territory, while developing a sense of belonging and proximity to UNICEF's action for cities.

Networking and support

Cities having been granted the CFCI title become part of a large network facilitated by the National Committee. The main networking activity is a major conference organized annually in Paris, which gathers representatives of all accredited child-friendly cities, usually one elected official and one technical staff.

While it offers a forum for cities to meet and exchange experiences, and for UNICEF to communicate on the initiative, the conference cannot replace smaller local meetings in which cities could discuss issues of local relevance. A municipal officer suggested that an adequate format would consist in gathering 3 times a year for half-a-day all CFCI municipal officers in the department. UNICEF's Departmental Committee could facilitate.

In 2016, a significant development has been the development of a training programme dedicated to strengthening capacities of key actors in the Child Friendly City Initiative at the municipal level. The programme includes 3 different modules, one for elected officials, one for technical staff, and one for UNICEF local committees' focal point volunteers on CFCI. It could also help foster smaller groups of peers and informal networks.

Management of the participation in the CFCI at city level: CFCI structures and organization

In the context of the partnership with UNICEF, Child Friendly Cities are solely required to designate a focal point within the municipality for all interactions with UNICEF. While some CFCI structures, such as a children's municipal councils, are highly recommended under the CFCI framework, they do not represent an absolute obligation.

On a political level, in both cities visited the Deputy Mayor in charge of childhood policies was following the issue as part of her or his portfolio. Technical staff in charge of the project may or may not be directly involved in designing and implementing child rights policies in the city.

There is therefore no specific formal municipal body for CFCI. However, cities have established so-called 'UNICEF working groups', which typically gather a couple of elected officials including the Deputy Mayor, and a couple of municipal officials working on the partnership. These groups are not solely focused on CFCI and also include various actions directly or indirectly linked with the partnership, like Child Rights Day and World Water Day.

On a daily basis, municipalities therefore primarily see the management of the participation in the initiative as managing the partnership with UNICEF. Participation in CFCI is sometimes called the 'UNICEF project', hence more strongly linked to UNICEF than to the city itself. UNICEF staff on the ground may also present the initiative this way. A problematic result is that it can quickly be perceived as an event planning mechanism – for Child Rights Day and for fundraising for example – rather than as a vision for city's policies for and with children.

Local governance and CFCI

An important aspect of CFCI management at the city level relates to local governance rules and organization.

Two salient points have emerged from visits in this respect. A significant challenge in the implementation of the CFCI relates to the distribution of competencies among local levels of administration. This is a set of issues that goes beyond the initiative and which neither UNICEF nor the CFCI framework can readily address. However, it is important to consider the extent of its implications on local child rights policies.

Until 31 December 2015, Aubergenville was part of a "community of municipalities", an inter-municipal grouping gathering three cities. Responsibilities for policies and services related to children were split between municipal and inter-municipal competencies. As a result, interventions were fragmented among various structures under different management and political leadership. It was therefore difficult to develop a comprehensive local vision for children in the city. As of 2016, a new urban community was created, gathering over 70 municipalities, and childhood policies have returned under municipal competency. This may bring stronger coherence to municipal action and help foster coordination among actors.

From a different perspective, the influence of local governance is clear in the case of Colomiers as well. Here, the municipality has chosen not to delegate or subcontract any of its interventions. While many municipalities contract private actors to manage various municipal structures and functions, in Colomiers the city has retained entire control over service delivery. For example, it operates the movie theatre, which organizes activities for various audiences. Similarly, school canteens are publicly managed, with specialized staff working on nutritious meals. Staff working in various child care structures is on permanent contracts. As a result, turn over is limited and a stable group of persons follow families and children as they grow up, know their situation, and can detect signs of change. Responsiveness to individual situations has repeatedly been highlighted as a major strength of municipal action and directly attributed to staff stability. Long-term engagement also supports teamwork and motivation, and includes professional development opportunities.

Cross-sectoral coordination

Cross-sectoral coordination at the municipal level results from a multiplicity of factors. Observations made during field visits have highlighted the importance of a shared vision to foster coordination in childhood policies.

In Colomiers, the municipality's vision appeared to be shared across city departments and structures. This sense of a shared objective has helped foster coordination among actors, both across sectors (horizontal) and between municipal offices and staff operating on the ground (vertical).

A similar observation could be made in Aubergenville, even considering the distribution of competencies between the municipality and the inter-municipal grouping. Informants in various structures have reported how the existence of a common objective in the education sector to develop children's citizenship has provided a guiding principle to all interventions and helped develop a sense of cohesion among actors. Although the link is not made with the CFCI, there are significant opportunities for synergies.

Coordination across sectors at city level builds on the existence of common framework and vision for childhood policies. As such, it stems less from the participation in CFCI than from pre-existing or parallel political choices. Strong political engagement around child rights issues unsurprisingly plays a critical role in support of coordination. Communication around CFCI could further promote the initiative as cement for the city's interventions, staff motivation, and quality assurance.

Child rights advocacy and education, dissemination and awareness-raising

Child rights advocacy and education does not constitute one of the key thematic areas under the CFCI framework in France but is integrated under various thematic areas, in particular education and international solidarity. It is also part of the National Committee's daily activities for the promotion of children's rights and of UNICEF's action globally. The National Committee runs a programme through its Departmental Committees for child rights education in schools. The programme is not strongly connected to the CFCI, but visits have evidenced high demand for such activities in schools. It also works with the French Ombudsperson (Défenseur des droits) under a memorandum of understanding for sensitization on child rights with the population, especially children.

At the city level, visits have enabled to identify two main events for child rights advocacy and education.

- *Child Rights Day (20 November)*

Child Rights Day is widely celebrated and used as an opportunity to raise awareness on children's rights, especially with children themselves. It is usually marked by various special events often associating UNICEF, such as performances and a 'zumba night' in Aubergenville. It also provides a basis for a number of longer-term pedagogical activities around children's rights, inviting children to reflect on what these rights how and how they are realized, globally but also in their daily lives. Staff has noticed that the process was particularly empowering and helped develop children's autonomy and agency.

Child Rights Day probably represents the main opportunity for child rights education at the city level. It gives momentum for the organization of various activities. However, the link between these celebrations and the CFCI could be made stronger, in order to communicate with children about the value of living in an environment respectful of their rights. This could promote accountability and provide a channel for wider child participation in the city.

Resources the National Committee produces to support child rights education are often little known at the city level. Some of the resources shared by the National Committee staff during the visits were unknown to the staff yet found very useful. Increased communication around these tools, and an invitation to municipal officers to share them with relevant facilities and sections in the municipality, would be valuable.

- *World Water Day*

The National Committee has promoted World Water Day as an important fundraising event. Departmental Committees usually support the organization of the event, which typically takes place around the city's nautical facilities. In Colomiers, UNICEF's Young Ambassadors play an important role in 'Water night' (La Nuit de l'eau), which takes place in the evening at the municipal swimming-pool and includes various activities related to water. Funds collected go to the National Committee, which ranks contributions as an incentive for cities to feature among the highest donors. The event gives visibility to UNICEF at the city level and is often included in the annual plan for joint actions between UNICEF's Departmental Committee and the city under the CFCI partnership.

There is however a certain disconnect between the breadth of UNICEF's engagement nationally, its child rights mandate, and understandings at the local level. This situation becomes evident when interacting with UNICEF's Young Ambassadors, a programme that enables high school students to promote UNICEF's mandate and fundraise for UNICEF. While living in a child-friendly city and active in their school, they do not make the link between their action and what a child-friendly city means. Put simply, the fundraising function of the National Committee is seen as largely disjointed from its substantive engagement for the realization of children's rights at the national level. CFCI however offers a comprehensive approach that could be further built upon.

3. Accreditation process

The accreditation process for granting the CFCI title in France has evolved over time. Accreditation used to be nearly automatic for cities presenting a full application. Yet concerns that the title could be misused or become an empty shell have led the National Committee to review its accreditation process in 2014 to make it more stringent.

Under the French initiative, cities can receive the title, but also inter-municipal entities (intercommunalité – an administrative entity regrouping several municipalities), and departments (the administrative level right above municipality).

Accreditations are valid for the municipal electoral term (6 years) and need to be renewed after each municipal election.

The accreditation process is organized as follows:

1. The city is requested to fill out an application containing various documents:
 - A questionnaire on the city's interventions, current and planned, in 10 key thematic areas. For each area, the questionnaire requests information on the nature of interventions, their rationale and specific issues they aim to address, child participation in their design, implementation and evaluation, as well as the impact of such interventions, both positive and negative. An overview of the situation of children and childhood policies in the city is also requested.
 - A "dashboard" compiling mainly quantitative data on each of the 10 key thematic areas in addition to general data about the city, totalling approximately 400 questions.
 - A draft annual workplan for actions to be conducted jointly by the city and UNICEF's local committee;
 - Support letters by the mayor and UNICEF's local committee;
 - CFC focal points' contact details in the municipality.

2. Once received, the National Committee staff reviews the application and gives scores on the city's interventions and engagement in each thematic area. If it ranks below average, the city is asked to review and resubmit its application.
3. An evaluation committee composed of 6 UNICEF volunteers scores the quality of the city's partnership with UNICEF locally. Members of the evaluation committee are the same for all applications. Usually they are not engaged with the applicant city.
4. If the total score is above average, the city is granted the title.
5. A partnership contract between the city and UNICEF then identifies 3 priority areas for the city to focus on as part of the partnership. These areas are determined based on the strengths identified in the city's application.
6. The partnership contract, called the Commitment Charter (Charte d'Engagement), needs to be approved by the municipal council. A signature ceremony with local UNICEF National Committee representatives (volunteers) is typically organized.

4. Core components

While the National Committee used to rely on the traditional 9 building blocks for its CFCI, since 2014 it has concentrated on 10 key thematic areas based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It was deemed that the building blocks were too often misunderstood and little palpable for people on the ground. The rationale was therefore to make the application file closer to the Convention's provisions, in order to promote the concrete realization of children's rights at the city level and ensure a better understanding of these rights by municipalities. Several workshops were held in 2012 and 2013 with 50 local entities (cities and departments as per CFCI in France) to review the framework. Participating entities reviewed their competencies in relation to the CRC, identified 10 key thematic areas, and approved them.

10 Key thematic areas

1. Wellbeing and living environment
2. Non-discrimination and equal access to services
3. Child and adolescent civic participation
4. Security and protection
5. Parenting
6. Health, hygiene, nutrition
7. Disability
8. Education
9. Access to play, sport, culture and leisure
10. International solidarity

5. Child Participation

Child participation in the National Committee's approach

One of the key thematic areas for the CFCI accreditation process in France focuses on child and adolescent civil participation. Child participation is explicitly understood in the CFCI framework as an expression of children's full citizenship and their being considered as political actors in the city. Young people themselves developed the corresponding section in the application guidebook, emphasizing the need to address barriers to child participation, in particular by facilitating access to information for children and changing public perceptions of children and youth.

The National Committee organizes a large consultation on an annual basis with children on their situation and perceptions of their lives and ability to exercise their rights. Child-Friendly Cities participate in the consultation by encouraging and directly supporting children in filling out the questionnaire. However, interviews have pointed out that the questionnaire is too lengthy and complex. It requires a level of concentration that may not be adapted to all children or all ages. Consequently, children with high capacities for concentration and school competencies are more likely to respond than children in more difficult situations. Yet the consultation is a major way to make children's views heard and gives an overview of children's perceptions of their lives and environment. It is widely publicized in the media.

In relation to the management of CFCI, child participation has been overall limited. However, the new organisational structure within the National Committee places CFCI and youth engagement in the same division, presenting opportunities for closer linkages in the future.

Child participation in CFCI management at city level

The main body through which children participate in the city's management is the child or youth municipal council. Actors immediately identify such councils as the main manifestation of the city's child-friendliness. Child and youth councils convey the idea that children play an active role in city's policy-making and represent their peers, the same way elected adults do. This ideal image harbours diverse realities. Behind the façade of a functioning child municipal council, the nature, extent, and quality of child participation varies greatly. While some councils are genuine fora for children to make decisions, issue proposals and take initiatives, others can easily become tokenistic mechanisms – even with the best intentions.

Both cities visited have set up such a body, which operates as a 'shadow' municipal council, meeting in the council's room every other week, and with child members attending official events. Children are elected by their peers.

Colomiers' youth municipal council (Conseil Municipal Jeunes – CMJ)

In Colomiers, the Youth Municipal Council (CMJ) was created in 1996. It actually pre-existed the recognition of Colomiers as a Child-Friendly City and made the original proposal for the first application of the city to the CFCI. It has 32 members, with an equal number of boys and girls, elected by their peers in 6 electoral districts.

Candidates are 9 to 14 years old, representing 2 age groups, 9-11 and 12-14 years old. They have to present an electoral programme with 3 or 4 proposals for measures or initiatives in the city. As a result, they get elected on their ideas rather than who they are. To ensure equality, they are not allowed to run their own campaign (hold meetings, distribute leaflets) beyond the use of supports provided by the city. Electoral districts are designed to ensure a diverse representation.

Once elected, the CMJ is divided into 4 thematic committees working on substantive proposals for initiatives (environment, sport, solidarity, urban planning, etc.). Proposals are selected from the electoral programmes candidates have submitted. The council has a budget of 8,000 euros it can freely manage. It can also make proposals to the adult council for projects. Plenary sessions are held once or twice a year and the mayor participates.

Initiatives typically engage the city's population beyond members of the council. Children have undertaken research with the most marginalized in the municipality by conducting door-to-door interviews in order to identify their needs. They organize an annual "day without cars", bike and rollers hikes, or a video-games competition. They take the lead in the organization of all events. Representatives of the CMJ are also invited to official events.

A municipal officer is in charge of supporting the work of the council, by guiding its work, facilitating discussions and managing actions children cannot take on, such as signing contracts and making payments. He does not set the agenda but helps children define it.

An ethics committee also accompanies the CMJ. Its role is to ensure the ethical and transparent functioning of the council. It is composed of one municipal councillor, 3 deputy mayors, 2 former CMJ members, 4 members of parent-teachers associations, 2 teaching staff, 3 municipal services staff, and 7 members from NGOs.

Website (in French): <http://www.cmj-colomiers.com/>

Cities pay attention to the inclusion of children from all walks of life in such councils but in practice, this can be difficult to implement. In Colomiers, electoral districts were modified to increase diversity. However, many children in the council are from either well-off families or children of municipal or elected officials. No child with disabilities appears to be part of the councils visited. It is therefore critical that such mechanisms be seen as one body among many possible channels for children, including the most marginalized, to be heard.

A question is whether child municipal council activities are geared towards concrete initiatives benefitting all citizens – or at least children – in the municipality. Visits highlighted that councils can become very self-centred. Activities can be solely run by child members of the council, rather than involve other children and the city's inhabitants in general – even if aimed at general interest. They may be decided without a consultative process involving other children and consist in one-off initiatives – such as child members collecting garbage to clean up some areas – without prospects for systemic change or sustainability.

Lack of interaction with other city mechanisms can make the child municipal council isolated and limit access to political reflections on improving daily life in the city, which would be critical to build children's capacities and give them ideas. It also means that no specific moment is planned for exchanges between adult elected officials and young ones. The views of the latter therefore have little opportunity to be heard, let alone be taken into consideration. Yet, when it happens, the exchange presents great opportunities for uptake of children's views in city policies and interventions.

Lack of training for municipal officials working with child municipal councils is a critical issue. Adults in charge of supporting the work of these councils may not have a sound understanding of genuine child participation. Child participation is included in tools shared by the National Committee, but specific guidance on the shift of perspective it implies is lacking. As a result, very valuable intentions may result in ineffective mechanisms.

Specific training and guidance tools helping those engaged with these councils would be highly necessary. To that end, a partnership with the National Association of Child and Youth Councils (ANACEJ) could be very valuable. Child and youth municipal councils nationally are usually members of ANACEJ. The Association was created in 1991 and includes 400 councils from various levels of government administration and youth movements. It provides training and various tools to its members to help them develop effective councils.

Child participation is an important indicator of child-friendliness, but the establishment of a specific body may have been given too much importance in comparison with other aspects. As a result, cities may set up child participation mechanisms without sufficiently considering their actual value and effectiveness. Concrete guidance on possible municipal mechanisms for child participation, including child municipal councils but also beyond, is needed.

Child participation in daily activities in cities

Solid understandings of child participation in the city appear to lie first and foremost with professional approaches at the structure's level. While these experiences may be less documented as they are integrated into daily routine and do not involve major events, a lot of lessons could be learnt from them.

Staff interviews held in various facilities welcoming children and adolescents show that child participation is a daily habit, embedded in professional practices. Children can choose their activities according to their needs and preferences. They are regularly consulted, usually during the afternoon snack, on how their day went, what they liked, what could be improved and what they would like to do the next day. These views are registered on the facilities' records for discussion in staff meetings. In one instance, space organization in the structure was changed to better adapt children's views and needs. Some of these methods could valuably be used to promote child participation in other settings – by making it look simple and doable rather than a major endeavour.

City programmes targeting adolescents function as clubs in which adolescents take responsibilities with support from an adult group leader. They manage their own initiatives from artwork projects to trips abroad. They also organize the daily functioning of the group, for errands, cleaning, or welcoming newcomers. While young people participating seem to enjoy going there, attendance is often limited, as many have other activities and interests. As a result, groups visited appeared lively, but they remain small scale.

In one city, adolescents voiced the concern that the city did not offer much to them. They explained how they often have nothing to do and would appreciate more opportunities for activities. Municipal staff has acknowledged the problem and the city is working on a strategy for young people.

The National Committee could further build on synergies with other existing child and youth engagement mechanisms, such as the Young Ambassadors programme. Young Ambassadors work within their schools to raise awareness on children's rights and UNICEF's action and collect funds. Yet, their knowledge of, and involvement in, CFCI is limited. They could however significantly contribute in raising awareness on CFCI, advocating for children's rights locally, and mobilizing other young people. They could support child municipal councils in communicating about their initiatives for example. However the department and the region, not the municipality, manage junior and high schools, meaning that students may come from various municipalities, making things more complex. In any case, awareness of CFCI should be part of their regular training and guidance tools.

6. Equality and non-discrimination

The CFCI framework and the principle of equity and non-discrimination

The CFCI framework in France contains an explicit focus on non-discrimination and equal access to services. Cities applying to CFCI are requested to provide information on their interventions aimed at addressing social exclusion. The accompanying guide sets forth the multiple dimensions of accessibility to services and emphasizes the importance of a thorough situation analysis identifying marginalized children.

The framework further includes disability as a key thematic area. Cities are asked to report on steps taken to ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities. The guide indicates various elements of inclusive policies, such as accessibility, cross-sector coordination, social attitudes, individualized approaches, parenting support, and the full and equal participation of children with disabilities.

In reviewing applications for the CFC title, the National Committee closely reviews how these elements are reflected in cities' actions.

Cities' policies must also abide by domestic legislation, regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities for example, and benefit from targeted support for disadvantaged neighbourhoods through various urban policy instruments.

Interventions aimed at addressing social exclusion

Services

Cities have developed a range of services targeting the most marginalized and addressing barriers to social diversity. Publicly run structures coexist with associations' work. A schematic typology of such structures includes:

- *Services specifically targeting marginalized populations*, usually located in the city's poorest areas and responding to the needs of the local population.

"Everybody's House"

In Aubergenville, "Everybody's House" (La Maison de Tous) is located within the housing project area. Membership fees start at about 5 euros a year for the lowest income range. The structure offers a wide range of services and activities, including family day trips at a reduced cost, and a space for socialization with a coffee shop. Typical users are families with a migrant background, the elderly, and other neighbourhood residents. Members are regularly consulted on activities and invited to propose and conduct workshops themselves. Older ladies teach knitting, members with a migrant background host ethnic cooking classes, etc. The centre enables neighbours to socialize and access information on their rights, entitlements, and work opportunities. It also hosts a day care centre with extended opening hours. Children can drop in any time in order to meet the needs of parents, especially single mothers, with unstable jobs and unpredictable schedules.

- *Efforts to make universal services more accessible to the most disadvantaged*, by addressing social or cultural barriers. In Aubergenville, the music school has developed a "mini-concert" initiative, in which the youngest musicians play in nurseries for babies. It has also organized concerts in the housing project area, in order to get closer to an audience underrepresented among music school students. In Colomiers, the city supports lunchtime activities in a junior high school where many students come from disadvantaged families. In this space, young people, who may have aggressive behaviors, have to follow community rules

while being able to express their individual needs. Colomiers' public library, also accommodating a modern art museum and built by a renowned architect, is designed to accommodate various audiences. Cultural activities are diverse; furniture is designed for various abilities, heights and corpulence; children's and adults' books are mixed, so anyone has direct access to simpler or more elaborate books, regardless of their age.

- *Individualized approaches within universal services, in particular for children with specific needs.* While some needs, such as eating restrictions, are accommodated, staff often reported that they do not have the skills or the capacity to include children with disabilities in day care activities for example, questioning social inclusion.

In Colomiers, children with special needs have access to a desk adapted to their situation from kindergarden and support of a teaching assistant. Efforts are also made for children with disabilities to have access to after-school activities, to guarantee continuity and avoid their exclusion if their friends participate in such activities. A programme also identifies early on children at risk of not doing well in school and provides them with small group sessions to develop their attention and study skills.

Local policies

Overarching local policies have taken into consideration various aspects of equal access to services and equal opportunities more generally. Examples of interventions include:

- *Revision of the school map.* In Colomiers, the school map was revamped to ensure greater social diversity in schools. It has also generally developed its urban planning to ensure socially mixed neighborhoods across town.
- *Transportation policy.* City transportation promotes equal access to services, encourages social diversity and avoids isolating neighborhoods. In Colomiers, city buses are free, making moving around and accessing services easy, including for those in a difficult economic situation. In Aubergenville, transportation is not free and internal city lines are limited. Inhabitants have identified transportation cost and timing as a barrier to services and activities for those without a car and/or restricted budgets. Municipal staff indicated that free transportation had been challenged by competition laws.
- *Pricing policy.* Pricing for services offered by the city usually depends on the family's income. However, some similar services, such as after-school activities, may have a very low cost for some programmes and be more costly for others. Poorer children tend to attend low-cost programmes, and those from better-off family would avoid these ("for another type of population") and go to the more costly ones, reinforcing disparities.

Approaches to non-discrimination and equity are largely connected to national policies and local priorities. The CFCI framework is not specifically perceived as an instrument for the development of such interventions. Consequently, while measures to address disparities are in place, they are not understood at the city level as a component of what makes a city child-friendly. Better communication around CFCI would enable to give visibility to children and could contribute to promoting measures targeting children specifically.

Consequently, UNICEF could further build on the combination of its advocacy efforts at national and local level to promote child-sensitive interventions aiming to address discrimination and inequalities. Advocacy work around the Innocenti Report Card for example, which largely focuses on child poverty and child wellbeing and usually draws significant attention nationally, could use the CFCI network to promote and support relevant policy interventions. It could also feature Child-Friendly Cities' good practices in addressing UNICEF's advocacy priority issues of national relevance as examples.

The 'give and take approach' some cities have promoted as part of their support to the most marginalized would fit well with the CFCI child rights approach. In Aubergenville, facilities aiming to promote social inclusion for the most disadvantaged aim to promote users' participation in the life of the facility. This approach is similar to the CFCI vision of children as actors in their city. Better linkages between such services and CFCI would help give visibility to children and ensure that such approaches include children and not only adults. It could also contribute to making CFCI better understood by various actors.

Constant analysis of the situation to adapt responses is critical. It implies that municipal staff and elected officials have regular, direct interactions with citizens, including children, to know their daily difficulties and be able to quickly react. While cities may be making significant efforts to reduce disparities, indirect discrimination elements remain. Here again, the CFCI framework provides tools to detect issues.

7. Partnerships

Civil society direct engagement in CFCI

CFCI in France primarily focuses on the engagement of public institutions. The accreditation process concentrates on documents submitted by the city administration. The initiative is co-managed with the French Mayors' Association which gathers elected officials.

Civil society, understood as grassroots organizations, does not have an explicit role in the CFCI management and accreditation process. The participation of civil society, beyond the lead organizations (the National Committee and the AMF), would present significant challenges in terms of logistics and power balance. Which organizations should be involved? How would they be selected? Would they be supported? How to ensure their legitimacy and representativity? However, if the National Committee sees vibrant civil society as integral to CFCI, it should probably make more space for civil society's voices.

The application file and accompanying guide focus on the importance of involving local associations as integral to a child-friendly city, often on the frontline to address citizens' daily problems. Local administrations are encouraged to develop partnerships with them and support them. The application file could request the city to explain how it supports civil society and whether associations operating in the city have been consulted in the preparation for accreditation. The mid-term evaluation could be made available to civil society organizations, which could be asked to comment.

Overall, there is an inherent imbalance of power between public authorities and civil society within the governance system, which affects CFCI as a whole. The National Committee is first and foremost an association. While it benefits from the respectability and clout of UNICEF's brand, counterparts in public authorities still consider it a charity. In a country where the State has a strong role, an initiative run by civil society has inherent limits. CFCI provides a supportive framework but local authorities remain prominent in the partnership. As a result, in interacting with city authorities, UNICEF can use the carrot, but not the stick. The alliance with the French Mayors' Association is very strategic in this respect and helps mitigate the problem. Yet unless cities make a request, spontaneous offers for help may not be welcome.

The partnership with the French Mayors' Association (Association des Maires de France - AMF)

From its inception, CFCI in France has built on a partnership with the French Mayors' Association, which gathers mayors from virtually all French municipalities, approximately 36,000. The AMF is a forum for mayors to discuss issues of common interest and develop collaborative projects including to access funding. While formally a registered association, as the representative body for elected officials it is highly respected and enjoys significant political clout. Its president is usually a renowned politician. The partnership gives UNICEF access to all French mayors and enhances the legitimacy of CFCI. It helps make CFCI visible and credible, and channel information to all cities in France.

Civil society engagement in child-friendly interventions

While civil society organizations may not explicitly be linked to the CFCI title, they are often part of the broader picture for a child-friendly city. Many structures financed by municipalities have the legal status of associations. Others are citizen-driven and aim to complement public actions in various areas.

The **Associations' House** (Maison des Associations) is a facility made available by many cities in France, including the two cities visited. It aims to support associations by meeting some of their structural needs, like providing a space to hold meetings and events and an address for legal purposes and to receive mail.

Various civil society organizations focus on solidarity and various forms of support to the most marginalized. In Aubergenville, the neighborhood's house (Maison de Voisinage) offers social activities supported by associations, in addition to public services such as civil registry and counselling. In Colomiers, a national NGO supporting people living in poverty ("Le Secours Populaire") provides food and clothing, as well as various activities for families in extremely difficult conditions. Approaches pay specific attention to users' dignity and social inclusion. When children have school activities requiring special attire, such as skiing trips, the centre will lend equipment to enable them to participate.

Sports and leisure activities also involve associations. In Aubergenville, a successful programme developed in partnership with sports associations enables children to try out various sports, in order help them select the one(s) they want to pursue and may not have thought of, thus also helping break stereotypes.

Civil society supports public authorities in some actions, and may complement interventions, but its policy-making role remains limited. Colomiers has a tradition of setting up working groups on specific issues gathering a wide range of stakeholders including civil society. These efforts are notable, but they remain ad-hoc, consultative bodies.

Business sector and CFCI

The business sector is not seen as a direct partner in the context of CFCI. Efforts to partner with businesses at the municipal level usually tend to focus on job creation and revenues for the city budget, which does have an impact on children, but is not seen as integral to child-friendly policies. Colomiers has a major industry on its territory, which generates significant revenue and economic activity, but it is not specifically linked to CFCI or childhood programmes.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

Impact of CFCI

The impact of CFCI, in particular outcomes for children living in the city, is complex to determine due to the multiplicity of factors coming into play. It is uneasy to distinguish the city's interventions that are directly linked to its participation in the CFCI, and those that do fit into the CFCI framework but are in place as part of broader child friendly policies. The CFCI title may prompt some actions and events, but often appears as an endorsement of an existing situation rather than an impetus for change. CFCI primarily emerges as one component in an array of tools and approaches that guide cities' work for and with children.

In Colomiers, strong social policies, and in particular childhood policies, have been a municipal feature for decades, supported by political leadership stability. In this context, participation in CFCI has been perceived since inception as an additional, external, recognition of existing practices. In Aubergenville, participation in CFCI is first and foremost seen as a partnership with UNICEF for international solidarity, i.e. as a window to the world, rather than internalized as integral to the policy environment. It seems to be perceived as a stand-alone project rather than an overarching framework for municipal policies.

A comment informants repeatedly made in one of the cities relates to how, for municipal services, CFCI and the partnership with UNICEF gives meaning ("donne du sens") to daily interventions. Except for a few flagship events, separate interventions may not be directly linked to CFCI. However, it makes staff and structures see their individual roles as contributions to a common social goal. The fact that it is apolitical can further help bring people together around a common project.

Evaluation by the National Committee

Evaluation of impact from the National Committee's perspective has been limited to (re-) accreditation thus far. Yet, the accreditation process is based on information submitted by the municipality. It is mainly internal, with National Committee staff rating applications. The review committee composed of volunteers also mainly conducts an evaluation on the basis of documents provided and its score only concerns one dimension, the relationship with UNICEF's local committee. As a result, the process is primarily based on self-evaluation. This methodology echoes the prevailing approach UNICEF has developed at international level. Self-assessment tools the UNICEF Secretariat has made available have been key instruments in the development and growth of the initiative globally. They concentrate on cities' ownership of the process, rather than on UNICEF's close external evaluation. As part of the new procedure in place since 2014, the National Committee plans to request municipalities to fill out a mid-term self-evaluation questionnaire on CFCI implementation.

When the initiative reaches such a large scale, evaluation will necessarily involve a significant self-evaluation component. The breadth of the CFCI framework, like the Convention itself, means that a thorough external evaluation would be difficult to manage. One way to bring additional perspectives for the purpose of evaluation would be to consider a process similar to that of the CRC Committee, in which alternative reports could be submitted by other actors. In practice, this would be difficult to achieve, as there would be a significant risk that the process be politically manipulated. Actors with less resources or marginalized would most likely not be heard. It would also undermine a fundamental principle of CFCI, which is based on a partnership "among peers" between UNICEF and the city. However, finding space for the expression of a diversity of perspectives would be an important step forward.

Defining the role of UNICEF in relation to evaluation is complex. There is clearly a need and a demand for UNICEF to increase its technical assistance to cities in implementing CFCI. This role would normally be the responsibility of Departmental Committees, which are geographically close and have direct connections with municipalities. At the same time, it should not impair the trust they have built with municipal counterparts.

9. Key lessons learnt

The French experience in relation to CFCL is one of the oldest and most extensive in terms of the number of cities involved. As such, it provides interesting insights into the challenges and advantages of having a large-scale programme. Lessons learnt have highlighted a number of reflections in relation to the implementation of the CFCL in various dimensions. Concluding remarks will emphasize some of these of particular relevance for the development of the toolkit:

- *There is an inherent compromise to be made between quantity and quality in relation to CFCL.* Given the resources required to accompany cities and ensure quality outcomes, it would be challenging for any National Committee to have a large scale programme with a high quality level across cities. Evaluation is very complex and resource-intensive – and brings up a number of political sensitivities. Self-evaluation becomes necessary and it is a positive yet imperfect tool. Any National Committee wishing to scale up should be aware of these difficulties. However, CFCL does help make children visible at the city level and gives the National Committee visibility across the national territory, in bigger and smaller cities.
- *In order to run a major programme in a large country, UNICEF's engagement at the local level is critical.* The French National Committee could not manage such a large initiative without support from its local volunteers, organized in Departmental Committees. Even though their engagement is uneven, their presence is critical to the process. National Committees without similar local networks would probably have difficulties providing the minimum support needed to cities.
- *The National Committee double role as a child rights advocate nationally and as a fundraiser for UNICEF global action is both an asset and a constraint.* It is an asset because it gives UNICEF the legitimacy to interact with local authorities and provides the National Committee with ready-made tools to invite municipalities to promote children's rights. It is a constraint as it can lead to misunderstandings about the nature of CFCL as primarily a fundraising project. Better integration between the fundraising function and the local prominence the CFCL gives to UNICEF could be highly valuable to both programmes. It would support UNICEF's visibility across the territory, while developing a sense of belonging and proximity to UNICEF action for cities.
- *A significant challenge in the implementation of the CFCL relates to the distribution of competencies among local levels of administration.* This is a set of issues that goes beyond CFCL and which neither UNICEF nor the CFCL framework can readily address. However, National Committees engaging in promoting CFCL should be aware of the extent of implications on local policies for CRC implementation.
- *Ongoing capacity-building is greatly needed* to ensure that staff and local volunteers involved in the implementation of the CFCL at city level have an adequate understanding of the framework and how it is to be translated into interventions and approaches in practice.
- *The 'give and take approach' to empower the most marginalized and build their skills could be further developed in the context of the child rights approach the CFCL offers.* Better linkages with the CFC framework would help here again give visibility to children and ensure that such approaches include children and not only adults.
- *Child participation is a central dimension of a child-friendly city, but it needs to be accompanied with relevant tools, guidance and training, to ensure that it does not become an empty shell.* The toolkit will play an important role in explaining what genuine participation means and how it can concretely be facilitated. However, National Committees also need to make simple practical tools available to cities.
- *Indirect discrimination remains an issue.* While cities may be making significant efforts to reduce disparities, indirect discrimination elements remain. CFCL provides the opportunity to reflect on various forms of discrimination on the ground and engage various actors on the issue.