

## Chapter 3

# Fledgling Embeddedness of Child Rights Education into Early Childhood Education and Care Undergraduate Programs in Chile



## Are There Any Possibilities for the Enactment of Infants' and Toddlers' Rights in ECEC Centers?

Marcela Pardo and Daniela Jadue-Roa

**Abstract** This chapter explores how early childhood education and care (ECEC) undergraduate programs in Chile have been embedding the child rights education (CRE) framework (UNICEF, Child Rights Education Toolkit. UNICEF, Ginebra, 2014), asserting the importance of teachers as duty-bearers under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF, New York. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/UNCRC/>, 2017). It draws on findings from the authors' 2014 study into the embeddedness of the child rights approach to undergraduate programs in Chile. Regarding children's rights, Chile has followed a noteworthy trajectory—not only has there been consensus within the diverse fields working with and for children, but it has also become a matter for public policies. Certainly, the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents has, since the 1990s, designed public policies that promote the respect, protection, and fulfilment of children's rights (Chile-Ministerio de Desarrollo Social & Consejo Nacional de Infancia, Plan de Acción Nacional de Niñez y Adolescencia 2018–2025, en el marco de la Agenda de Desarrollo Sostenible 2030 y las

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Observaciones del Comité de los Derechos del Niño al Estado de Chile 2015 [National Action Plan for childhood and adolescence 2018–2025, framed within the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the Observations of the Children’s Rights Committee to the Chilean State 2015]. Ministerio de Desarrollo Social—Consejo Nacional de Infancia. Retrieved from <http://observatorioninez.consejoinfancia.gob.cl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/plan-de-accion-y-ODS-cuadernillo.pdf>, (2017). Also, within the ECEC field, the official national curriculum for children has considered young children as rights holders, in alignment with the principles enshrined in the UNCRC (Chile-Ministerio de Educación, Bases Curriculares de la Educación Parvularia [National curriculum for early childhood education]. MINEDUC, Santiago, 2001; Bases Curriculares Educación Parvularia [National curriculum for early childhood education]. MINEDUC, Santiago, 2018a), while the current standards for the initial preparation of ECEC teachers also acknowledge the relevance of children’s rights as a main reference for professional practice (Chile-Ministerio de Educación, Estándares Orientadores para Carreras de Educación Parvularia. Estándares Pedagógicos y Disciplinarios [National pedagogical and disciplinary standards for early childhood undergraduate programmes]. MINEDUC, Santiago, 2012). Despite this progress, the degree to which the CRE framework has permeated the undergraduate preparation of ECEC teachers remains uncertain. The chapter is organized into three sections: the first discusses the relevance of ECEC undergraduate programs in preparing teachers as duty-bearers under the UNCRC; the second contends that in the case of Chile, the embeddedness of the CRE framework is fledgling; and the third concludes by reflecting upon strategies to strengthen the embeddedness of the CRE framework into ECEC undergraduate programs in Chile.

**Keywords** Children’s rights · Duty-bearers · Teacher preparation · ECEC Chile

## **Child Rights Education for Strengthening ECEC Undergraduates Programs as Duty-Bearers**

As predicated in the UNCRC, the fulfilment of children’s rights is the responsibility of *duty-bearers*.<sup>1</sup> The state is the main duty-bearer, being accountable to children for the respect, protection and fulfilment of their rights. Other non-state entities also have obligations; they are referred to as *moral* duty-bearers, rather than *legal* duty-bearers. Among primary moral duty-bearers are teachers for students; among secondary moral duty-bearers are institutions and organizations with immediate jurisdiction over the primary duty-bearers, for instance, school principals. University teaching programs are among tertiary moral duty-bearers, as they have a relatively distant jurisdiction with respect to children (Ljungman & Forti, 2005). The United

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<sup>1</sup>Duty-bearers are entities that, under the UNCRC, have obligations to respect, protect and fulfill children’s rights (Ljungman & Forti, 2005).

Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has established the states' obligation to support training and capacity-building for moral duty-bearers, aiming not only to develop knowledge on how to develop its principles and provisions in practice, but also to promote attitudes and procedures that favor children's enjoyment of their rights. Moreover, this Committee has insisted on the inclusion of the UNCRC into curricula for professional preparation, after observing that duty-bearers tend to have insufficient knowledge and awareness of the UNCRC and the child rights approach (UNICEF, 2014).

The privileged instrument to develop knowledge, skills and values in relation to children's rights is termed child rights education (CRE), a component of human rights education that involves teaching and learning about the UNCRC and the child rights approach.<sup>2</sup> It encompasses embedding the UNCRC and the child rights approach in learning curricula and environments for children, and in the curricula and training of professionals working with children or working on issues affecting children. The content also extends to raising awareness of the UNCRC and the child rights approach through diverse channels—and building capacity to advocate for and implement the UNCRC and the child rights approach in daily life and professional practice (UNICEF, 2014).

Unfortunately, international research evidence suggests that CRE has not been systematically introduced into the curricula for professional preparation. For instance, Lundy et al. (2013) found that 12 countries<sup>3</sup> had only limited instances of systematic training for duty-bearers, despite the fact that representatives from governmental agencies with responsibility for children's rights, among others, widely recognized its importance. The situation seems to be similar regarding teacher preparation, which emerged more than two decades ago as a significant void in the promotion of teachers as duty-bearers for children's rights. For example, Osler (1994) recommended preparing teachers in the UNCRC, as a way to ensure that children may fulfil their rights. In accordance, Lansdown (1999) emphasized the need for teacher training in human rights education as a priority for the implementation of the UNCRC.

Showing the current validity of that concern, a study on teacher education in 19 Latin American countries<sup>4</sup> found that several of them have introduced references to human rights in national regulations for teacher education, even though teacher education institutions had delayed the adjustment of their respective plans of study

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<sup>2</sup>The child rights approach "(i) Furthers the realization of child rights as predicated in the UNCRC and other international human rights instruments; (ii) Guides behaviors, actions, policies and programs in accordance with child rights standards and principles from the UNCRC and other international human rights instruments; (iii) Develops children's capacities as rights-holders to claim their rights and duty-bearers' capacities to fulfil their obligations to children" (UNICEF, 2014, p. 21).

<sup>3</sup>These countries were Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden.

<sup>4</sup>These countries were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

(Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, 2004). At the same time, the evaluation of the first phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010) found that despite the appropriateness of the overall approach to teacher training, it continued to be one of the most common challenges in national implementation of human rights, as it tended to be addressed unsystematically. Likewise, surveys on human rights education carried out in Australia (Burridge et al., 2013), Finland (Human Rights Centre (HRC), 2014), and Denmark (The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2013), identified teacher training as one of the main priorities for the fulfilment of children's rights. Similarly, a survey on CRE commissioned by UNICEF (2016) across 26 countries<sup>5</sup> found that states generally do not ensure that teachers are trained in relation to human rights, in general, or to children's rights, in particular. Specifically, not even one of the participating countries in this study guaranteed that all teachers are prepared in children's rights and are familiar with the UNCRC and the child rights approach across their entire national training system.

Regarding ECEC undergraduate programs specifically, some international experience suggests that the UNCRC and the child rights approach have been variously embedded into curricula and training. Exemplifying this are the University of Oulu, Finland, and Stockholm University, Sweden—they have included courses expressly focused on children's rights (University of Oulu, 2013; University of Stockholm, 2015). Likewise, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) created, in partnership with UNICEF Canada, a guide aimed at enabling teaching students to develop children's voice and agency, and to advocate for children's rights (UNICEF—OISE, 2012). In Chile, the Catholic University at Temuco (located in the southern region of the country) offered a certification program—jointly designed with UNICEF Chile—for the faculty of all its undergraduate programs, including ECEC teaching programs (Universidad Católica de Temuco & UNICEF Chile, 2014).

## The Case of Chile

This section discusses how universities have been embedding the CRE framework in their ECEC undergraduate programs, as an attempt to fulfil their role as duty-bearers. This analysis relies on primary data from our study (“Exploration of the Embeddedness of the Child Rights Approach into Undergraduate Programs in Chile”), which was carried out in 2014 under the UNICEF office in Chile.<sup>6</sup> The study collected data through a survey containing both close-ended and open-ended

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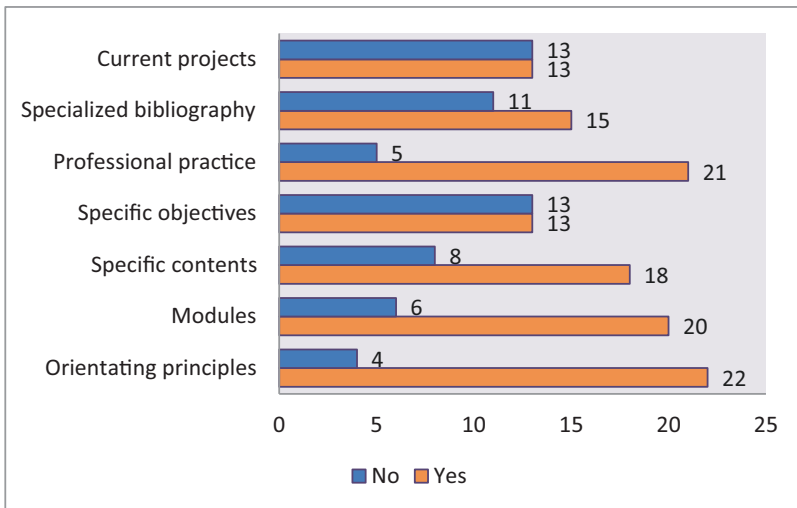
<sup>5</sup> These countries were Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and the USA.

<sup>6</sup> In Chile, ECEC undergraduate programs confer a qualification to work with children aged between 6 months and 6 years, with no specific differentiation between age ranges. Available evi-

questions, and a multiple case study on 10 programs throughout the country. The survey was answered by 26 out of the 49 programs then existing in the country. The multiple case study explored 10 of those programs in-depth—which constituted a sample quite illustrative of the institutional diversity of the country’s undergraduate ECEC programs. The study included semi-structured interviews with the heads of programs, along with an analysis of official documents (including the undergraduate profile, curriculum coursework and course programs).

### *Incipient Embeddedness of Child Rights Education into the Formal Curricula*

Given the lack of evidence on whether the CRE framework has been embedded into the curriculum of undergraduate ECEC teaching programs in Chile, our study sought to explore this issue. An initial finding was that most survey respondents declared that their respective programs have embedded the UNCRC into a number of components of the formal curriculum: in particular, orienting principles, specific objectives, modules, course content, professional practice, and specialized bibliographies (literature). These are shown in Fig. 3.1.



**Fig. 3.1** Components of the formal curriculum of undergraduate ECEC teaching programs in Chile where UNCRC and the child rights approach have been embedded. (Source: Authors’ elaboration based on results yielded by the survey applied in the study “Exploration of the Embeddedness of the Child Rights Approach into Undergraduate Programs in Chile”)

dence has shown that these programs have heavily focused on working with 4- to 6-year-olds, neglecting younger children (García-Huidobro, 2006).

Nonetheless, a perplexing finding of our study was an apparent lack of comprehension of core concepts of the UNCRC and the child rights approach. Specifically, regarding participating programs' guiding principles, most survey respondents declared that their respective programs comprised both the UNCRC and the child rights approach. As reported, three topics were associated with these principles: (1) concepts that are part of the rights perspective (e.g. children as right holders); (2) principles of the early childhood education field (e.g. singularity and play), and (3) pedagogical principles established in the national curriculum framework for ECEC (e.g. curriculum principles). Specifically, the professional competencies established in each program's undergraduate profiles were underlined as a concrete expression of this idea. The program heads cited these competencies as: respect for children as right holders, social responsibility, relationship with the family, recognition of the sociocultural context, and tolerance for diversity. However, in spite of the reports provided by the participants in our study, we found no evidence in the programs' guiding principles where the UNCRC or the child rights approach were explicitly declared.

P1: [Children's rights] are made explicit in the undergraduate profile; it also includes as a topic within several courses, and we expect that students know them. After that, we have a certain void as to how to assess, how to evidence that it is applied [in pedagogical practices].

In addition, half of the survey respondents reported that the UNCRC was embedded into their respective program's specific objectives. Suggesting perhaps a misunderstanding of the concepts underlying the UNCRC, two important issues emerged: (1) fewer participants specified objectives that referred directly to the UNCRC and the child rights approach, while (2) most of them referred to other objectives related to other social values (e.g. democracy and citizenship, social responsibility, ethics, and diversity in ECEC). The remaining objectives referred to the pedagogical work of ECEC teachers, with no mention of children's rights.

P2: Those [children's rights] are included in all the courses. Students have to introduce children's rights into their portfolios, to analyze how children are being treated, how children are being regarded, how children's rights are being emphasized.

When referring to program modules, specific units, and selected bibliographies, most survey respondents reported that the UNCRC and the child rights approach were included in at least one of these elements, showing a diversity of ways of introducing them into the professional preparation of ECEC teachers. Nevertheless, analysis of the institutional official documents suggested a lack of explicit reference to the UNCRC and the child rights approach, and a minimal body of literature specifically focused on these issues. Moreover, those three curricular elements—i.e. modules, specific units, and selected bibliographies—were related to the following topics: history of early childhood education, history of childhood and culture, family and community, reflective practice and pedagogical knowledge, public policies, diversity and inclusion, and early childhood curriculum.

The data collected through interviews with program heads provided a different perspective on the matter, adding some concerns. For example, several program

heads posited that their respective programs had not necessarily explicitly or systematically embedded the UNCRC and the child rights approach. Rather, in their view these had been implicitly present in a number of curriculum activities throughout the whole coursework; they claimed that these ideas have become common knowledge for scholars of the field, who have tended to embrace it.

P3: Somehow, it [children's rights] is a discourse that our professors have mastered and, therefore, they resort to it often in different courses ... it is not part of any syllabus, but it is part of a shared discourse ... it is something that our professors try, as a personal effort, to reflect since the beginning of their courses.

Adopting a more critical view of their own accomplishments, two program heads asserted that their respective programs had insufficiently embedded the UNCRC, putting forward two main reasons for this shortcoming. The first one was the constraints imposed by public policies for teacher preparation (particularly the *Inicia* test,<sup>7</sup> which assesses disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge), reducing their opportunity to allocate more time within the coursework to address other relevant areas. The second reason was the scarcity of both specialized scholars and bibliographic resources within their own programs. They claimed that a lack of these fundamental resources had hindered their ability to properly embed the UNCRC into the undergraduate preparation of ECEC students.

Moreover, we also found that some program heads resisted the very notion of children's rights, expressing apprehensions about it and being afraid that it may foster children who are individualistic and defiant of any authority.

P3: I am concerned about rising up this sort of a child king, who has more rights than duties.

In addition, other program heads expressed a concern that children's rights are a notion not appropriate for the case of Chile.

P4: They [children's rights] refer to very basic rights, unsatisfied basic needs (hungry, abuse, abandonment, mortality), and they blur in the reality of Chilean children. Because we do not have those problems. I feel that this [children's rights] has not instilled into public policies, what children's rights mean for Chilean children; we have the problem of having 45 children per class.

### ***Awareness-Raising on the UNCRC Through Extra-Curricular Activities***

As awareness constitutes a condition for the effective implementation of the UNCRC, our study explored whether or not undergraduate ECEC programs were promoting it. Remarkably, in accordance to most program heads' declarations, their

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<sup>7</sup>*Inicia* is the national exam for undergraduate teaching students in Chile, which, in its current version, is administered in their penultimate year of preparation. Administered annually since 2008, it is currently a requirement for undergraduate graduation as well as for undergraduate teaching program accreditation (Chile-Ministerio de Educación, 2018b).



respective institutions had been regularly carrying out several activities aimed at raising awareness of the UNCRC, in order to promote a wider awareness of children's rights, as well as an understanding of children as rights holders.

A common feature of the examples provided is that all these activities had not been part of the corresponding formal curricula. Rather, they had been purposely conceived as extra-curricular initiatives aimed at complementing the designed process of student preparation. These activities had aimed to raise awareness of the UNCRC provisions and principles and the child rights approach among diverse actors of the local ECEC community, including, for example, families and representatives of organizations related to early childhood. For instance, several programs had held fairs and exhibitions in public locations in their respective cities, where information about the rights of children had been disseminated by distributing flyers or exhibiting banners. Also, one program had enriched their own yearly celebration of the so-called *Children's Day* with activities carried out in public places to promote the advocacy for children's rights.

P5: This year we have carried out activities on children's rights in massively visited public locations. One of them was focused on child work. Students produced flyers for attendances; we produced banners containing the rights of children. This is not part of our formal curriculum, but we have been doing it. Students tell tales.

Adopting a different approach, two programs had carried out extra-curricular activities aimed at raising awareness among their own ECEC teaching students, as a complement to the regular preparation. The first program had fostered the preparation of their own faculty, in order to familiarize them with the UNCRC and the child rights approach, and also to be consistent with the UNCRC theoretical framework, the national laws and the educational system, so the faculty would be able to introduce these into the preparation of ECEC teaching students. The second program developed a workshop on the rights of children to be carried out annually, along with local organizations involved with early childhood, including ECEC and health providers, and the national service for childhood. Unfortunately, even though this experience had been conceived as part of the formal curriculum, eventually it was not supported by the authorities of the School of Education and it remained as an extra-curricular activity.

P6: [Embedding children's rights] implied that our team had begun to prepare on Child Rights Education, because this is not as simple as wanting to do something, but it implies knowing the principles, current laws, conventions, etc. For example, some years ago, two professors earned a diploma certification on children's rights ... we also had invited a UNICEF expert to do a workshop.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that two program heads expressed their concern over the impact of these activities, as they had the impression that students might not get as involved as expected, and, thus, might not be sufficiently committed to promoting the rights of children.



### ***Practical Preparation of Students Mainly Focused on Violations of Children's Rights***

Recognizing the relevance of building capacity for future ECEC teachers to advocate for and implement the UNCRC and the child rights approach in daily life and professional practice, our study explored how the UNCRC and the child rights approach have been grounded in the practical preparation of ECEC students. Interestingly, most survey respondents indicated that their respective programs had implemented different strategies and activities with this aim. Moreover, as explained, their overall expectation was that students would demonstrate the ability to integrate the UNCRC and the child rights approach into pedagogical practice during their professional internship,<sup>8</sup> which for them is the main evidence of the incorporation of the child rights approach in their undergraduate programs.

P7: We mainly focus on practical work, which means that students have to search for and work in favor of children's rights ... they have to infer the content of each right ... For example, they have to arrange the environment of a classroom including children's rights, representing each right.

Hence, all program heads explained that their respective programs have promoted high quality and child-centered experiences for children, defined in terms of three main indicators: (1) focusing on the principle of play established in the national early childhood curriculum; (2) attending to diversity; and (3) including children's families and relating the learning experiences offered to their sociocultural realities. However, these responses suggest a difficulty in differentiating between the theoretical concepts and principles of the UNCRC and the child rights approach and those that are specific to the ECEC field, as the interrelations that need to exist between these spheres were not introduced in a coherent manner into the preparation of students. In addition, half of the program heads explained that, when responding to intern students' reports of situations observed in partner ECEC centers, their respective institution had prioritized the focus on the violations of children's rights observed by students during internship, over the universality of children's rights.

P8: We focused [student's practical preparation] on the violation of children's rights: prevention of sexual abuse, drug consumption, family violence. Students carry out a project on those problems ... not only attending violated children, but also preventing violation.

Nonetheless, one program head raised questions concerning their own efforts for student ECEC teachers to advocate for and implement the UNCRC and the child rights approach. Specifically, she expressed her impression that their formative activities had remained at the level of principles, without being specified at the level of pedagogical knowledge; thus, in her opinion, their efforts might be ineffective.

P9: I think we need to improve in instilling an understanding [of children's rights], and that does not have a clear shape in undergraduate preparation, which implies discussion ...

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<sup>8</sup>In Chile, the professional internship is the last curriculum activity in ECEC undergraduate programs, being mandatory for graduation.

sometimes, we do not have the context or the support to better pinpoint the knowledge that ECEC teachers require in order to produce these social changes.

## **The Commitment of the ECEC Field in Chile to Embed Child Rights Education into ECEC Undergraduate Programs**

This chapter positioned ECEC undergraduate programs as duty-bearers under the UNCRC and also explored how ECEC undergraduate programs in Chile have been embedding the CRE framework. In summary, our findings suggest that this process is fledgling, for in our study we observed that the three components of CRE had not been thoroughly fulfilled, despite all participating programs declaring that they had introduced the CRE framework to some extent into a number of components of their formal curricula. Specifically, we found that the formal curricula contained scarce explicit references to the UNCRC and the child rights approach, while some relevant misunderstandings of CRE were apparent in several examples. In addition, we found that all participating programs carried out activities to promote awareness-raising on the UNCRC and the child rights approach on a reasonably regular basis; however, these activities were offered exclusively through extra-curricular activities. Finally, we found that participating programs built student ECEC teachers' capacity to advocate for and implement the UNCRC and the child rights approach through the practical preparation, but they only focused on violations of children's rights. These findings suggest that participating programs have not been fulfilling their role as duty-bearers under the UNCRC, which, in turn, indicates that Chile may be following the same trend that the specialized literature had previously described for the international landscape.

Our findings lead us to recommend that ECEC undergraduate programs should explicitly undertake their obligations as duty-bearers, strengthening their efforts to embed the UNCRC and the child rights approach into formal curricula, and acknowledging CRE as the backbone of this process. Nevertheless, we believe that overcoming this challenge is beyond their own reach, and also requires the involvement of other key actors of the ECEC field in Chile. Firstly, the Ministry of Education, as part of the Chilean State, should be involved. As mentioned in the previous section, several program heads considered that recent public policies for undergraduate teaching preparation were a major obstacle to a better introduction of CRE in the preparation of student ECEC teachers. Thus, this Ministry—in fulfilling its own duties under the UNCRC—should play an active role in promoting the embeddedness of CRE into ECEC undergraduate programs, resorting to, for example, the instruments currently used to improve undergraduate teaching programs (e.g. Performance Agreements).

A second actor that should be involved in this effort are the United Nations agencies that are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC by the Chilean State. As described in the previous section, participating programs had limited capacities for CRE (i.e. specialist scholars, and specialized literature). Therefore,

the involvement of the United Nations agencies seems to be necessary to build stronger capacity within ECEC undergraduate programs. Specifically, this may imply support in the form of workshops for faculty and students, suggested relevant bibliographies (literature), criteria to define protocols for action in cases of violations of children's rights during students' internships, and the promotion of a national network of research on CRE, as suggested by one of the program heads:

P10: [UNICEF should provide ECEC undergraduate programs with] the possibility to prepare scholars on this issue [children's rights], by means of academic visits, doctoral programs, sharing experiences of preparation in different universities, establishing networks in Chile and Latin-America, in order to generate advanced knowledge.

Even though our study focused on ECEC undergraduate programs, it allows for a plausible answer to the question asked in the title of this chapter, regarding children's rights in infant-toddler care and education. Keeping in mind that, under the UNCRC, these programs have the obligation to prepare ECEC teachers as primary duty-bearers, our findings suggest that students from participating programs may have acquired limited knowledge and professional competencies in regard to the UNCRC and the child rights approach. Thus, it is likely that they have not been adequately prepared to respect, protect, and fulfil children's rights. Moving forward requires that this shortcoming is not understood as the sole responsibility of undergraduate ECEC programs, but as the commitment of the ECEC field in Chile.

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