

# ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON UNICEF'S STRATEGIC PLAN



2022-2025

Engaging children and young people on UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2022-2025

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# INTRODUCTION

Children have the right to be heard on matters that affect them. Article 12<sup>1</sup> of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) lays out this basic human right of every child. As an organization mandated to realize children's rights, UNICEF is stepping up its engagement with children and young people – as resources who have unique knowledge of their own and their communities' circumstances, needs and concerns, and as problem solvers and agents of change who have good ideas and can contribute to innovative solutions.

To ensure that its new Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, is informed by the voices of children, UNICEF rolled out an unprecedented process of consultation. Online consultations through existing platforms, including Voices of Youth (VOY) and U-Report, engaged over 214,000 children and young people globally on education, climate change, mental health and discrimination. The U-Report poll was rolled out locally in 17 countries: Afghanistan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cote-d'Ivoire, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon, Nigeria, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. VOY conducted polls through its website, as well as its Twitter and Instagram, receiving over 6,000 responses altogether.

Meanwhile, 30 countries held virtual or in-person workshops:<sup>2</sup> Afghanistan, Algeria, Anguilla, Barbados, Bhutan, Brazil, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominica, Ecuador, France, Georgia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kosovo, Laos, Lebanon, Montserrat, Philippines, Romania, Spain, Syria, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe. Children and young people were consulted on six priority areas: learning and skills, climate change, mental health, gender equality, children and adolescents in humanitarian and protracted crises, and UNICEF engagement with children and young people.

UNICEF promoted the consultations through its various communication channels and with the support of country and regional offices, as well as through partners including youth networks, Generation Unlimited and the Global Volunteer initiative. The process was designed to ensure that children and young people from marginalized groups would be reached, and that platforms were accessible to those with disabilities.

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1. Article 12 of the CRC provides: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

2. The organization of consultation workshops strictly followed national COVID-19 safety guidelines, including for in-person workshops in country-contexts where COVID-19 was not posing a threat to children's safe assembly.





This report represents a summary of all the inputs gathered during the engagement process. It provides a thematic analysis of the issues, needs and solutions identified by children and young people, and their overall observations related to the six topics of the consultations.

The report starts with an analysis of issues that emerged in the discussions regardless of the subject matter, and that were hence identified as affecting all areas of children and young people's lives. The analysis then turns to the specific topics that were selected as part of these consultations given their growing momentum for the organization and children. By defining these areas more strategically within UNICEF's priorities, we could potentially find a pathway to accelerate results for children and strengthen organizational approaches to addressing emerging global challenges. The report concludes with a short overview of how the new Strategic Plan aligns to the feedback gathered and zooms in UNICEF's commitment to becoming a child- and youth-powered organization.



Children have the right to be heard on matters that affect them.

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# CROSS-CUTTING MESSAGES FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## ADULTS SHOULD LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, AND SUPPORT THEIR CAPACITY TO ENGAGE.

Across all the consultations, children and young people emphasized that they have good ideas about the issues that affect their lives and our shared world – but they do not feel they are listened to. They called upon adults whose actions and decisions affect their lives – including UNICEF, their governments, their teachers and parents – to listen to and engage them. Children and young people called on UNICEF to help create an enabling environment for them to obtain the knowledge, skills and tools to better participate in policymaking and decision-making.

## COLLECTIVE ACTION BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IS A POWERFUL FORCE TO PROVIDE MUTUAL SUPPORT AND DRIVE CHANGE.

Children and young people emphasized peer support, peer education and youth-led organizations as key to their capacity to make a difference in their lives and communities. Youth volunteers were also mentioned as having great potential to make a difference on issues such as climate change, and to help children and young people in low-income countries.

## RACISM, GENDER INEQUALITY AND OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION PERMEATE ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE, AND CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT TO COUNTER THEM.

“The education to respect diversity has to be promoted since an early age. Small children suffer the prejudice for being black, for being a girl and keep accumulating trauma. I believe that the family and the school should work together to promote positive examples for children. [...] Minority groups are never represented. We have to find ways to change this with policies of quota and other affirmative actions.” (GIRL, 18, BRAZIL)

Children and young people emphasized that racism and discrimination are pervasive in their environments and communities, underpinning many of the issues they face, and also pointed to gender inequality and gender-based violence as permeating all aspects of life.

This was echoed by participants in the Global Outlook 2025 consultations, which emphasized that UNICEF must also address systemic racism and gender inequality in everything it does, including building equitable and supportive relationships with marginalized communities and ensuring diverse and equitable representation in its workforce.

Children and young people also expressed the need to take special measures to ensure that children and young people with disabilities, those in rural and isolated communities, and those without shelter or family care, get the services, education and engagement opportunities that are their right.

Children and young people feel that the best way to fight discrimination is by speaking up and taking action, changing mindsets, and educating themselves, including through education about racism and different cultures. Activities that bring children and young people from different backgrounds together are a key part of this, so that they can learn from and accept each other. More than 40 per cent in the VOY poll said they need the support of adults – especially parents and teachers – to fight discrimination.

### **SCHOOLS ARE A KEY PLATFORM FOR ADDRESSING THE RANGE OF ISSUES FACING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.**

Children and young people identified schools as pivotal to many aspects of their lives, providing not only education, but also essential support services and spaces for social life, dialogue and collective action. As such, they are critical to addressing all the issues covered in these consultations.

Children and young people want their schools to treat them as agents in their own learning, to equip them with skills that are relevant to their lives and will help them succeed in today's world, and to make learning responsive to their individual needs, and inclusive, non-discriminatory and accessible to all students. They want their school environments to be more supportive, to address the huge degree to which school itself can be a source of stress, offer information on, and support for, their mental health and wellbeing, and provide a space to learn and organize in order to tackle climate change and counter gender inequality, racism and other forms of discrimination. They want schools to systematically engage them in decision-making about their education and other aspects of school life, and to facilitate their civic engagement outside of school. For children and young people in humanitarian and protracted crises, education is a lifeline, critical to their well-being and safety in the present and their ability to create a future for themselves.



**PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS CAN BECOME THE FIRST AND BEST ALLIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, IF THEY ARE MADE MORE AWARE AND BETTER EQUIPPED TO SUPPORT THEM.**

**“[It’s important for UNICEF to] follow up with parents and give them information on how to create a dialogue with children.” (ALGERIA, 19-24 YEARS OLD<sup>3</sup>)**



Children and young people want their families to be a safe space for them to grow. They want to be able to have open conversations with their parents, and for their parents to respect their agency, give them the freedom to evolve, and accept them for who they are.

Building the capacities of parents to understand their children’s lives and the issues they face is key to enabling parents to engage, guide and support their children more effectively. It is also vital for addressing pressing issues that are tied up with social norms, attitudes and practices that begin at home – including removing stigma around mental health, ending child marriage and child labour, promoting gender equality and girls’ empowerment, addressing discrimination, and promoting children’s rights, including their right to be heard. Children and young people also called for effective financial and social support and economic empowerment for their families, to address the ways that poverty and crisis can become a barrier to learning, well-being, and the uptake of behaviours to address climate change and environmental degradation.

**TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP ADDRESS A RANGE OF ISSUES, BUT ALSO CREATES SERIOUS RISKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – AND THOSE WHO CANNOT ACCESS IT RISK BEING LEFT FURTHER BEHIND.**

Technology was cited as something both good and bad – a platform for learning, advocacy and engagement, but also a source of stress, misinformation, abuse and violent content. And children and young people are acutely concerned about the ways that lack of access to digital technologies and skills exacerbates inequalities. They called for concerted efforts to address the digital divide expand access to digital connectivity, tools and skills, and make virtual spaces safer.

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3. References to certain quotes by children and young people in this report only include the age group that was consulted. The age of participants was not always recorded in order to ensure anonymity in accordance with child safeguarding measures put in place in the organizing UNICEF country office.

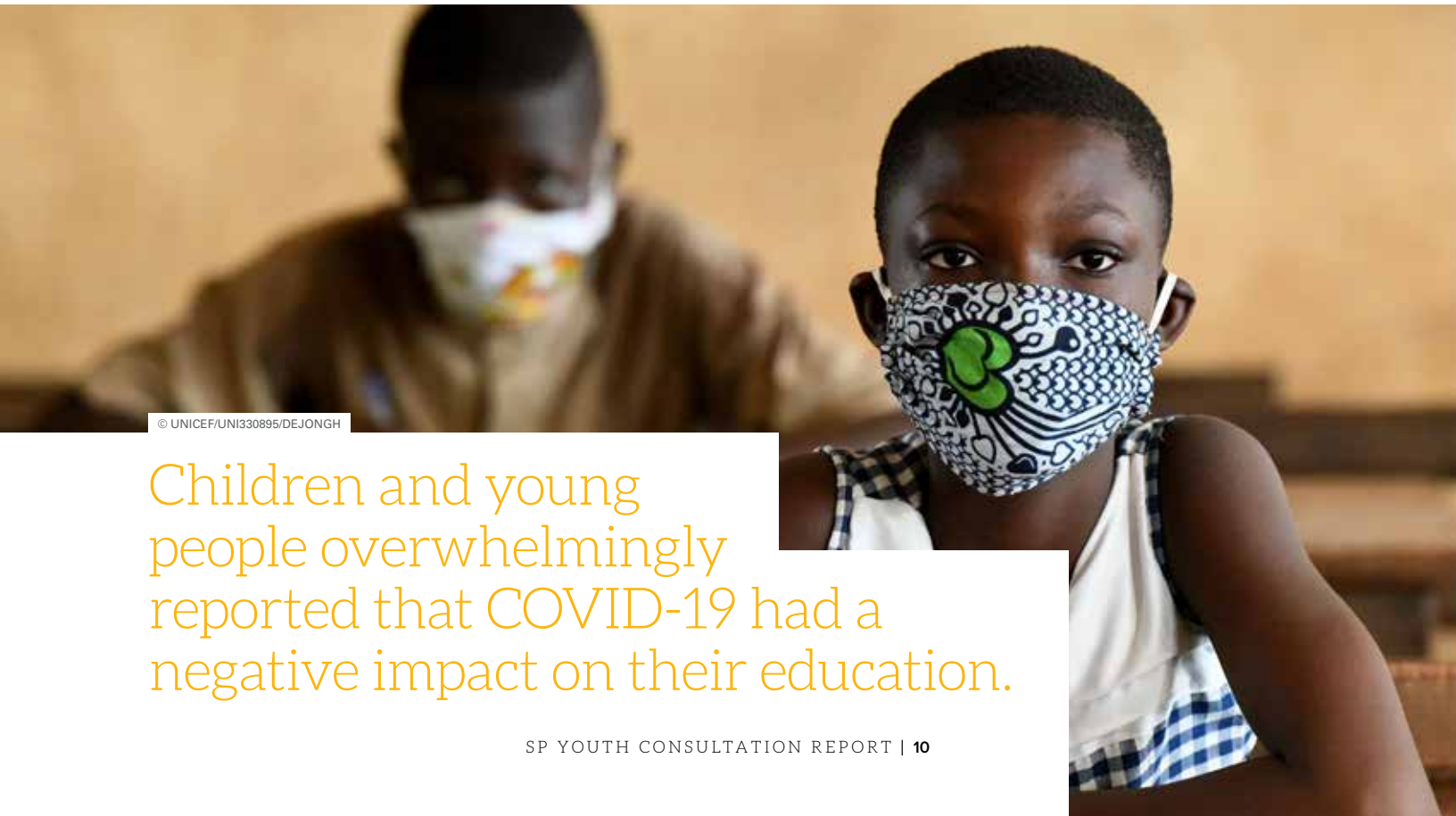
# LEARNING AND SKILLS



## COVID-19 BROUGHT MASSIVE DISRUPTIONS TO EDUCATION, ALONG WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN, FOR THOSE ABLE TO ACCESS THEM.

Children and young people overwhelmingly reported that COVID-19 had a negative impact on their education. They found that remote learning made it harder to get individualized support from their teachers, while the isolation from peers and the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic strained their mental health. In addition to learning struggles associated with missed schooldays and remote learning, they reported missing extracurricular activities like sports.

On the plus side, children and young people reported more intergenerational solidarity – between teachers and students, and within their own families – as the pandemic forced everyone to share and communicate more. Some children and young people found more opportunities for self-learning, and an increased focus on soft skills, finding time to develop creative ideas, find imaginative ways to pass the time, read more, and identify innovative solutions to problems in their societies. Many mentioned better sleep quality.



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Children and young people overwhelmingly reported that COVID-19 had a negative impact on their education.

“I think the main pro, we can get from this experience of the pandemic is how everyone in the world has been forced to adopt to the use of technology [...]. It can be used to support children in the future, learning can be made easier, like in the comfort of your home. [...] That is the main positive to get out of it, you can use it to boost learning among our youth.” (DOMINICA, 14-17 YEARS OLD)

**MANY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL THEY DON'T HAVE THE DIGITAL SKILLS THEY NEED, AND WHILE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES HAVE POTENTIAL TO ENHANCE LEARNING, THE DIGITAL DIVIDE EXCLUDES MANY.**

Less than half (47%) of respondents to the U-Report poll feel they have the digital skills they need in life, with the proportion higher among boys (52%) than girls (43%). Moreover, children and young people reported that online schooling is inaccessible to most disadvantaged children – including many in rural communities, those on the move, and those with disabilities – who lack access to digital tools and technologies.

43% of respondents in the U-Report poll cited better access to technology as the most urgent thing that can be done to help children and young people develop the skills they need. Children and young people called for new approaches that use accessible digital technologies to deepen their intellectual skills, and for opportunities to learn how to use digital tools, including through social media and other platforms that are already widely used. They also pointed out that children and young people need to be taught how to use the internet safely and overcome risks like cyberbullying, exposure to hate speech and violent content, phishing, sexual exploitation and abuse. They suggested that this be done through peer education and in partnership with private IT companies.

**DISCRIMINATION AND POVERTY ARE SERIOUS BARRIERS TO EDUCATION, AND GOVERNMENTS NEED TO PROVIDE RESOURCES, BUILD CAPACITIES AND RAISE AWARENESS SO THAT ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CAN LEARN.**

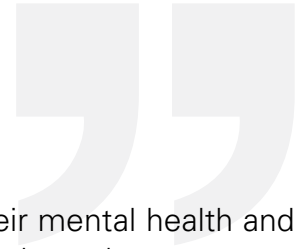
Children and young people spoke of lack of access to learning opportunities as a result of discrimination against children with disabilities, children on the move and those from marginalized communities, as well as girls in some contexts. They cited child labour, child marriage and violent extremism as serious barriers to accessing education. They also reported that lack of funding to pay for education – including school supplies, transportation, and in some cases direct education costs – is another key barrier, along with lack of awareness of the importance of education among parents in some rural communities and low-income countries.

Children and young people called on governments to act to ensure that they can access learning opportunities and counter the discrimination that leads to exclusion from education. They urged governments to build the capacities of teachers to support young people from vulnerable communities, and to train specialized teachers to engage children with disabilities. Some suggested that children with disabilities could also benefit from peer support in school, and that children should be sensitized about disabilities in order to provide that support. They also suggested that governments

should support volunteers to work in communities, to build capacities and share knowledge, and create data bundles to ease access to online material and skills development opportunities.

## TO LEARN EFFECTIVELY, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FOR THEIR MENTAL HEALTH.

“If we have the skills to ask for help, then we will have the skills to help others too.” (BOY, 16, INDONESIA)



Children and young people identified the need for more support for their mental health and psychosocial well-being from their parents and teachers – and the need to advocate especially for more support for marginalized children and adolescents in this respect. Adolescents, they noted, need psychosocial support owing to the changes they experience during this decade of life – now compounded by the additional strain caused by the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. They also called for teachers and parents to focus on their holistic needs as a way of supporting their wellbeing and reduce pressure for academic achievement, that can be caused by high assignment or class loads.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WANT HOLISTIC, INDIVIDUALIZED AND PARTICIPATORY EDUCATION THAT SUPPORTS THEIR AGENCY AND EQUIPS THEM WITH THE MOST RELEVANT SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN TODAY’S WORLD.

Children and young people want their education to focus on the individualized development of each student, in a holistic way that doesn’t just focus on grades and is sensitive to students’ needs. Many children and young people – nearly a third of respondents to the VOY Instagram poll – expressed that they don’t feel that they are learning the most relevant skills, and that school curricula need updating.

In the U-Report poll, two things emerged as most urgent to help children and young people develop the skills they need: better access to technology, and better teacher training, each cited by 43% of respondents worldwide. (In South Asia, though, only 21% cited technology, while 20% urged the creation of new subjects.)

Children and young people want more opportunities to develop soft skills, entrepreneurial mindsets, and digital skills. They identified the need for more modern teaching methods, citing a less formal, more playful mode of teaching that would make young people actors in their own learning. This is especially important for marginalized young people, who may not be comfortable with traditional school systems. Schools should make sure students are actively involved in their own learning, for instance by having opportunities to propose ideas and be asked their opinions. Peer learning and youth volunteers were also cited as an important way to support students from disadvantaged communities.

# CLIMATE CHANGE



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL THAT THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE, BUT TO DO SO EFFECTIVELY, THEY NEED TO BE LISTENED TO AND EQUIPPED WITH THE TOOLS, SKILLS AND ENVIRONMENTS TO ENABLE THEIR ENGAGEMENT.

“The government doesn’t invite us to discuss, that is why we [young people] start to take action by ourselves. We are not paid and do the work voluntarily. My expectation is for the government to invite us to discuss these issues, formulate solutions and identify the root of the problem.”

(BOY, 22, INDONESIA)

Children and young people are deeply concerned about climate change and environmental degradation. In the U-Report poll, 76% of respondents believed they have a responsibility to tackle climate change. Around 40% in the VOY poll feel they don’t have the tools to tackle climate change.

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Children and young people reported that they don't feel they are listened to when they express concerns about climate change or propose solutions. They called upon UNICEF to increase its role as a facilitator, to help open doors for them to engage with policymakers and organizations, and urged the creation of platforms and opportunities to amplify the voices of children on climate change and contribute to discussions with international organizations, national governments and local authorities.

### **YOUTH ACTIVISTS AND YOUTH GROUPS ARE KEY TO MOBILIZING YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE.**

Young people need support to become more connected, share ideas, learn, and collaborate with other activists and groups, including internationally. Children and young people suggested that countries nominate national youth advocates, and that training should be available to enable young activists to effectively engage with policymakers and take part in government discussions. They asked UNICEF to share more resources with young people on volunteering and otherwise getting involved at the national, regional and global levels, and they called for more funding, from both governments and UNICEF, for youth groups working on climate change and environmental protection.

### **TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE STARTS WITH EDUCATION AND AWARENESS, INCLUDING THROUGH SCHOOLS AND YOUTH GROUPS, AS WELL AS PUBLIC ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT.**

42% of respondents to the U-Report poll identified awareness-raising as the most important action to fight climate and reduce damage to the environment – more than any other action, including recycling waste (14%), investing in renewable energy (13%) and reducing resource consumption (11%). Lack of a green mentality or culture, children and young people noted, contribute to problems like air pollution, and so do socioeconomic factors – for instance, many households cannot afford environmentally friendly heating sources.

Children and young people feel it is vital to provide greater education to children, youth and adults on the impacts of climate change, what contributes to it, and how we can mitigate it. This education should start early and be incorporated into school curricula, from primary school all the way to university. Schools should receive more funding to promote climate-related activities, and ministries of education and environment should work together. These activities can include the creation of youth volunteer groups to raise awareness and keep school grounds and public spaces clean. Capacity building is needed to enable young people, as well as their teachers, to advocate and act, especially in rural areas where there may be less concern about the issue. Parents, too, need to be sensitized to the issue.

Broader advocacy and engagement campaigns are also necessary to educate people, fight misinformation and climate change skepticism, and encourage the use of alternative energy sources – and generally help people develop a sense that they need to protect the environment. Some children and young people expressed concerns that national climate-focused activities were not always sustainably maintained: for instance, trees planted on national tree planting days are subsequently not tended.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EMPHASIZE INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AND AWARENESS, BUT ALSO HAVE MANY IDEAS FOR POLICY-LEVEL CHANGES TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND CREATE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES AND JOBS.

Overall, children and young people talked extensively about awareness raising and individual actions – such as reducing plastic use, promoting recycling and waste sorting, or working to restore forest covers. However, they also considered government actions and proposed a number of measures.

Children and young people urged governments to take stronger measures to protect the environment, including by incentivizing these individual actions and discouraging behaviours that contribute to environmental degradation. They called for improvements to waste management and recycling, regulations to limit plastics and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and industry, promotion of renewable energy and alternative means of transportation, and stronger measures to protect the environment, including through alternative means of cultivation that limit deforestation that hurts both the environment and the livelihoods of people in rural areas. Governments should balance economic and environmental priorities, focusing on sustainable development. This was emphasized especially by young people from small island states that rely on tourism but are more vulnerable to climate change impacts. Part of this balance entails creating more job opportunities and alternative solutions that discourage unsustainable resource exploitation and deforestation.

“We are the most at risk. [...] Even though the older [generation] may have caused this to happen, we are the ones at risk, we have to step up. We deserve the same opportunities as the person who lived before us to breathe fresh air and go to the beach. We have the right to those things, and it is important that everyone is engaged in the discussion because we all have to [...] step up no matter what challenges we face.” (BARBADOS, 15-24 YEARS OLD)



# MENTAL HEALTH



STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH AND LACK OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SUPPORT ARE SIGNIFICANT ISSUES FACED BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

“I feel like a little animal put away in a cage, a little animal that was once free, and all of a sudden I am not free anymore.” (GIRL, 14, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, IN A CONVERSATION WITH MIGRANT AND REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS)



In many contexts, mental health is barely acknowledged as an issue, and can be accompanied by stigma and misunderstanding – or even seen as taboo. And there is not enough information available about it which is accessible for young people. All of this makes it extremely difficult to get support. Since it is often seen as taboo and goes unacknowledged, young people suffer in silence, without the means to cope.

Children and young people want to change that, and feel that mental health disorders, including those that are especially stigmatized, should be positioned like any other health issues. Generally, children and young people urged teachers and family members to talk about mental health more. Education and awareness-raising of young people and adults, including through sharing real experiences and life stories, were considered to be the best approach to fighting stigma and demystifying myths related to mental health.

Over half (58%) of children and young people surveyed through U-Report said they want to learn about mental health from professionals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other organizations with expertise in the subject. A significant number of respondents to the VOY poll (15%) said they'd like to hear from people with direct experience of mental health issues.

Children and young people need safe spaces where they can freely express their views and feelings; some mentioned wanting a safe, calming space away from stress to talk and learn about mental health. Adolescents consulted for UNICEF's mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and participation guidance<sup>4</sup> stressed the importance of sharing information

4. The section on mental health also includes input from adolescents aged 10-19 years from Cameroon, Indonesia, Libya, Moldova, Nigeria, and Ukraine, who were consulted to inform UNICEF guidance on mental health and psychosocial support and adolescent participation.

with them about the services and policies that are relevant to their needs, and regularly consulting them in designing and implementing programmes.

**PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS NEED MORE AWARENESS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, AND SHOULD APPROACH THEM WITH UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT.**

“Some adolescents are not lucky enough to have family and parents who would listen to them and understand. That is why they choose not to share [their feelings] and problems start there, because when you keep it to yourself, you become overwhelmed and depressed.” (BOY, 16, GEORGIA)

Parents, in particular, need to be made more aware of the issues children and young people struggle with. Adolescents consulted for UNICEF's MHPSS and participation guidance noted that their own views and opinions may be quite different from their parents' or caregivers', and called for opportunities to share their views and feelings with their families. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to be affectionate and patient, and to take their children's views and feelings seriously when they make decisions that affect them.

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Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to be affectionate and patient.

## **SCHOOL IS A KEY PLACE TO HIGHLIGHT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND OFFER PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT.**

Children and young people identified school as a significant source of stress – and it's also the place where they most want to learn about mental health. When asked where they'd like to learn about mental health, 37% of U-Report respondents said at school – more than on social media (29%) or at home (19%). While technology can offer opportunities to get information and anonymous support, it is not always an effective way to learn and interact and is not accessible to every household.

Children and young people feel that school- and community-based interventions should involve counselors, teachers and youth leaders, and mentioned that child-led curricula and peer-to-peer approaches are important as well. Although schools were identified as the most effective place to raise awareness about and address mental health, teachers rated quite low among those from whom they want to learn about mental health (10% of U-Report respondents). Children and young people did not feel they can trust teachers to understand issues concerning their wellbeing, including stress and anxiety related to academic achievement, or provide a safe space for dialogue. Children and young people primarily want to learn about mental health from experts (58% of U-Report respondents). They would like to see schools collaborate more proactively with experts in developing and rolling out school-based mental health interventions, as well as strengthen teachers' capacities to identify, react and deal with their students' mental health issues.

## **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT NEEDS TO BE INTEGRATED INTO THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, RESPECTFUL OF THEIR INDIVIDUALITY, AND TAILORED TO THEIR DIVERSE NEEDS AND CONTEXTS.**

Children and young people want to be supported in ways that support their autonomy, and that make the systems that serve them adaptive to their needs. Adolescents consulted by UNICEF in developing guidance on mental health and participation called upon adults to engage them as individuals who have their own views, feelings and opinions, and to consider their contexts and respect their experiences and contributions. They noted that those experiences may be quite different based on gender identity, sexuality, family income, age, ethnicity and other factors. Children and young people should not be stereotyped and discriminated against, nor should anyone be judged or criticized in ways that hurt their feelings.

Children and young people emphasized that mental health and psychosocial support services should be child-friendly and integrated with existing services, including in schools and community centres, with referrals to the health system as needed. Children and young people want mental health and psychosocial support to be well integrated with their other needs – including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, inclusion, recreation and play, and environmental protection.



Addressing gender-based violence and gender inequality – cited as placing great strain on mental health – is part of this support as well. Access to childcare was noted (by adolescents consulted for the MHPSS guidance) as a key part of providing support for the well-being of adolescents who are parents.

**PEER SUPPORT, ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT ARE CRITICAL TO PROMOTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.**

Peer counselling and community engagement were identified as key avenues for both learning about mental health and receiving support. Adolescents consulted for UNICEF’s MHPSS and participation guidance called for regular consultations and dialogue with children and young people, to inform projects geared towards improving their situation. They also asked for support in improving their own communication skills and building their self-esteem, suggesting that music and other cultural activities, digital technologies and other stimulating activities be used to engage and motivate them. Support for youth groups, networks and action initiatives is critical as well, and adolescents also called for support to learn how local and national authorities work, and how they can influence them.



# GENDER EQUALITY



“Many people still think that sexual orientation is an illness, that gender and sex are the same or that boys should be ‘masculine’ and girls should be ‘feminine’. We’re all unique and beautiful in our own ways.” (ROMANIA, 13-18 YEARS OLD)

## ENDING GENDER INEQUALITY WILL TAKE A WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH THAT ADDRESSES ITS INTERSECTIONS WITH OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION.

Children and young people pointed to gender inequality as permeating all aspects of life, and as strongly linked to other forms of discrimination, including racism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia.

Solutions to fight gender inequality must therefore be carried out at many levels, including in individual attitudes and social norms, within families and communities, in social services, schools, laws and policies, and in public discourse and media. They must also take an intersectional approach that addresses multiple, compounded experiences of discrimination and inequalities. All sectors of society – families, schools, faith organizations, local communities, elders and leaders, social workers, and local and national governments – need greater awareness and capacity-building to promote gender equality, racial equality, and acceptance of everyone as they are.

Discrimination, children and young people said, comes from a lack of understanding and empathy, so we need more education on gender inequalities and their intersections with discrimination against underrepresented communities, including issues faced by all genders; on gender-based violence; and on their impacts on children’s lives. Children and young people stressed that prejudices and biases need to be addressed before they escalate into violence and discrimination.

“We, as a society, are fostering the idea for girls to live in constant fear. Girls have to be constantly careful, but we do not teach men how to behave respectfully. We only teach girls about fear, and never about freedom.” (SPAIN, 15-19 YEARS OLD)

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### **IN MANY CONTEXTS, GIRLS ARE STILL TREATED AS SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS.**

Children and young people noted that girls are more affected by gender-based violence, harmful practices like female genital mutilation and child marriage, and don't have the same opportunities and rights as boys. Girls may be expected to stay at home, not allowed to speak or express their opinions, or make decisions for themselves. The demands of housework and childcare, and societal pressure to marry, may force girls to drop out of school and make it hard to pursue higher education, and girls may have fewer opportunities than boys to participate or lead in school or community organizations, public spaces and development programmes. In the workforce, girls may have fewer job opportunities.

Girls tend to be seen as weaker than boys, and judged on their appearance and past mistakes. Children and young people saw links between inequality in access to education and increased risks of gender-based violence, and also noted that girls who survive violence are often unheard.

### **BOYS AND MEN HAVE A KEY ROLE IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY, WHICH INCLUDES CHANGING NORMS AROUND MASCULINITY AND RETHINKING THE ROLES OF MEN AND BOYS IN SOCIETIES.**

Gender inequality also harms boys. Boys and men need to be engaged in fighting against gender inequality, for instance through discussions that challenge gender norms and harmful stereotypes, raise awareness about rights, and encourage allyship with girls and women. Deconstructing toxic masculinity is an integral part of this, and boys need safe spaces to do this work. Children and young people noted the need to address the socialization of young boys, so that they can understand gender equality from an early age.

Social norms around what it means to be a man can prevent boys from exploring their feelings and being emotionally open, and can put great pressure on them to be breadwinners for their families. This can put boys at high risk of some of the worst forms of child labour, as especially noted by children and young people affected by humanitarian crises. Boys may be forced to migrate to neighbouring countries to find job opportunities, and may end up living and working in abusive, exploitative conditions. Furthermore, boys who face sexual violence often fail to report it, because of strong social and cultural taboos – and because in most cases, no one would believe them.

“The people should really get educated on who is vulnerable to abuse, share statistics with them and have other men going through the same experience or who have gone through that experience share it with them that they should not be ashamed of what they’re going through. It’s really important that anybody going through abuse knows and accepts the fact that they are not a victim and the fact that they look forward to everyday proves they are a survivor.” (ZIMBABWE, 10-24 YEARS OLD)

### **PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF LGBTQI+ PEOPLE IS INTEGRAL TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY.**

LGBTQI+ children and young people experience a disproportionate amount of violence and hatred, including bullying at school, and face heightened risks of mental health issues.

Across societies, children and young people identified widespread ignorance and lack of understanding as being at the root of these issues. There is not enough representation of LGBTQI+ individuals in public spaces. Media spread misinformation and perpetuate stigma, schools do not provide safe spaces for all gender identities, and families are often not supportive.

Children and young people urged their peers to support each other better, and to call out discrimination and violence against LGBTQI+ peers. They called upon governments to promote and provide protection and rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and for diverse gender identities to be normalized in school, communities and families. Faith actors should not adversely influence the rights and protection afforded to children, and dialogue between young people and faith actors should be strengthened.

Educational resources should be more widely shared to raise awareness and promote acceptance of the LGBTQI+ community, and to fight gender discrimination. UNICEF should raise the profile of LGBTQI+ role models, advocate for LGBTQI+ children, and organize events in schools to raise awareness.

## **EMPOWERMENT FOR GIRLS, WOMEN AND UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES IS KEY TO PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY.**

Girls and women need to be included in all sectors of society, with responsibilities distributed equally and their opinions listened to and considered equally. Building their confidence is key, including by unlearning norms and attitudes that normalize gender-based violence and abuse, and by equipping them with the tools to defend themselves, seek legal support, access education, and challenge the status quo in society. Poverty intersects with and exacerbates discrimination, leaving the most vulnerable children and young people with limited access to education; information about their own rights, gender and equality; and participation opportunities. Economic empowerment programmes for poor communities are key to eliminating discrimination.

Girls should be supported to create their own action groups, to raise awareness in their communities and in consultation with local elders. They can also serve as role models for other girls, to promote access to education and encourage girls to go to school. UNICEF should harness its ability to bring people together and facilitate conversations that amplify the voices of young activists of diverse identities.

## **GENDER EQUALITY STARTS AT HOME.**

How parents and caregivers treat boys and girls at home is at the root of gender inequality – and also at the root of change, when children can experience kindness and acceptance, and be educated about gender inequality, at home. Families should encourage open communication with their children, so that children feel that home is a safe space to discuss their problems.

Parents and caregivers should be made more aware of children's and young people's rights and experiences related to gender. They should accept current realities – for instance, that keeping girls from attending school is not always a solution to keep them safe – and be sensitized to the importance of girls' education and equal opportunities for girls and boys, and the harmful effects of child marriage. Parents should be equipped with resources to better understand and fight taboos, and be better capacitated to provide moral support and help to children who experience gender-based discrimination or violence.

## **SCHOOLS ARE CRITICAL SPACES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY.**

Along with families, children and young people identified schools as key to fighting gender discrimination and biases – and said that the two spheres should work together and learn from each other. Children and young people called for inclusive education based on empathy, tolerance and equality. Schools should be more inclusive of diverse gender identities, break down harmful gender stereotypes and norms, and raise awareness of gender issues, racial inequality and other forms of discrimination, as well as related mental health issues. Education professionals and school counsellors should be better trained to address all these issues.

Education should be made more accessible for girls in poor communities and low-income countries, with free courses and scholarships as well as advocacy to prevent child marriage.



Schools should strive to break taboos around menstrual hygiene, to fight absenteeism and raise boys' awareness to prevent mockery and humiliation of girls. Extra-curricular activities, sports and recreation during which girls and boys can mingle, get to know each other, and share experiences are also important.

Curricula should teach children how to overcome discrimination and promote dialogue, social change, representation and peer education, and schools should promote participation in community projects to address gender inequality. Sex education should be included in curricula, as should LGBTQI+ concerns. Feedback mechanisms within schools should be established to address discriminatory behaviours, while schools should be prepared to mitigate and respond to gender-based violence, and to support children who have experienced violence and discrimination.

### **GOVERNMENT HAVE A KEY ROLE TO PLAY IN FIGHTING GENDER INEQUALITY.**

Alongside changing social norms that perpetuate discrimination, stronger laws and policies are key. This includes reinforcing judiciary systems and implementing strict legislation against gender-based violence, and ensuring security for girls and women in educational spaces. Governments should increase their support to girls' and women's initiatives, including through funding, and offer better training and professionalization for women in trades traditionally considered to be for men only.

Meanwhile, professionals in government, the health sector, schools and other key sectors working on child-related issues should be better trained to address issues related to gender inequality, racial inequality, and issues specific to particularly vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI+ children and young people. Service providers, including police, need to be equipped and trained to assist gender-based violence survivors, and shelters and other structures should offer psychosocial support. Governments should strengthen their partnerships with organizations that work on gender-based violence and discrimination.

### **SOCIAL AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA ARE PART OF BOTH THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION.**

Children and young people saw the media – including social and traditional media – as having a massive influence on gender-based violence and gender inequality, and as being permeated by patriarchy, white supremacy and privilege. Social media is also a space with rampant bullying.

Children and young people called for strengthening online child protection and ethical standards in the media for better, unbiased representation of gender and other identities. Efforts are needed to tackle misinformation, violent content and content that promotes discrimination. Better coverage of diverse role models is needed, along with promotion of content created, for instance, by people who have experienced gender-based violence. UNICEF should invest in advocacy for positive media.

On the plus side, social media is a great tool to make children and young people more aware of their rights and responsibilities, to educate people about gender discrimination, to demonstrate that not everyone has to be the same, and to spark discussions and action. It is also a place where children who experience discrimination can find peer support. To reach people in remote areas, who may not have internet access, social media campaigns should be complemented by use of traditional media like radio and television.

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Alongside changing social norms that perpetuate discrimination, stronger laws and policies are key.

# HUMANITARIAN AND PROTRACTED CRISES



“Seeing dead bodies has become normal. We live in constant fear of terrorism to return, we cannot live in peace.” (IRAQ, 10-24 YEARS OLD)

The consultations included workshops held with crisis-affected children in Afghanistan, Brazil, Dominica, India, Iraq, Montserrat, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zimbabwe. Children and young people were asked about the key priority needs for children in humanitarian crises, what role they can play in finding solutions, and what kind of support they need to be part of solutions. In some countries, they were also asked about children’s particular contributions to building peace or enhancing disaster preparedness in their communities and societies.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN HUMANITARIAN AND PROTRACTED CRISES STRUGGLE TO HAVE THEIR BASIC NEEDS MET.

Children and young people cited lack of access to health care, especially to address needs that go beyond primary care. They spoke of inadequate housing and infrastructure, and of the huge improvement in their lives when they are able to have their own housing, however rudimentary it may be.

“Pads! Pads! Pads! Please. Pads are more important than condoms.” (ZIMBABWE, 10-24 YEARS OLD)

Safe WASH facilities were noted as key to not only their hygiene – including menstrual hygiene – but also their privacy and protection. Internally displaced children also noted their key role in preventing tensions among ethnic groups within camps.

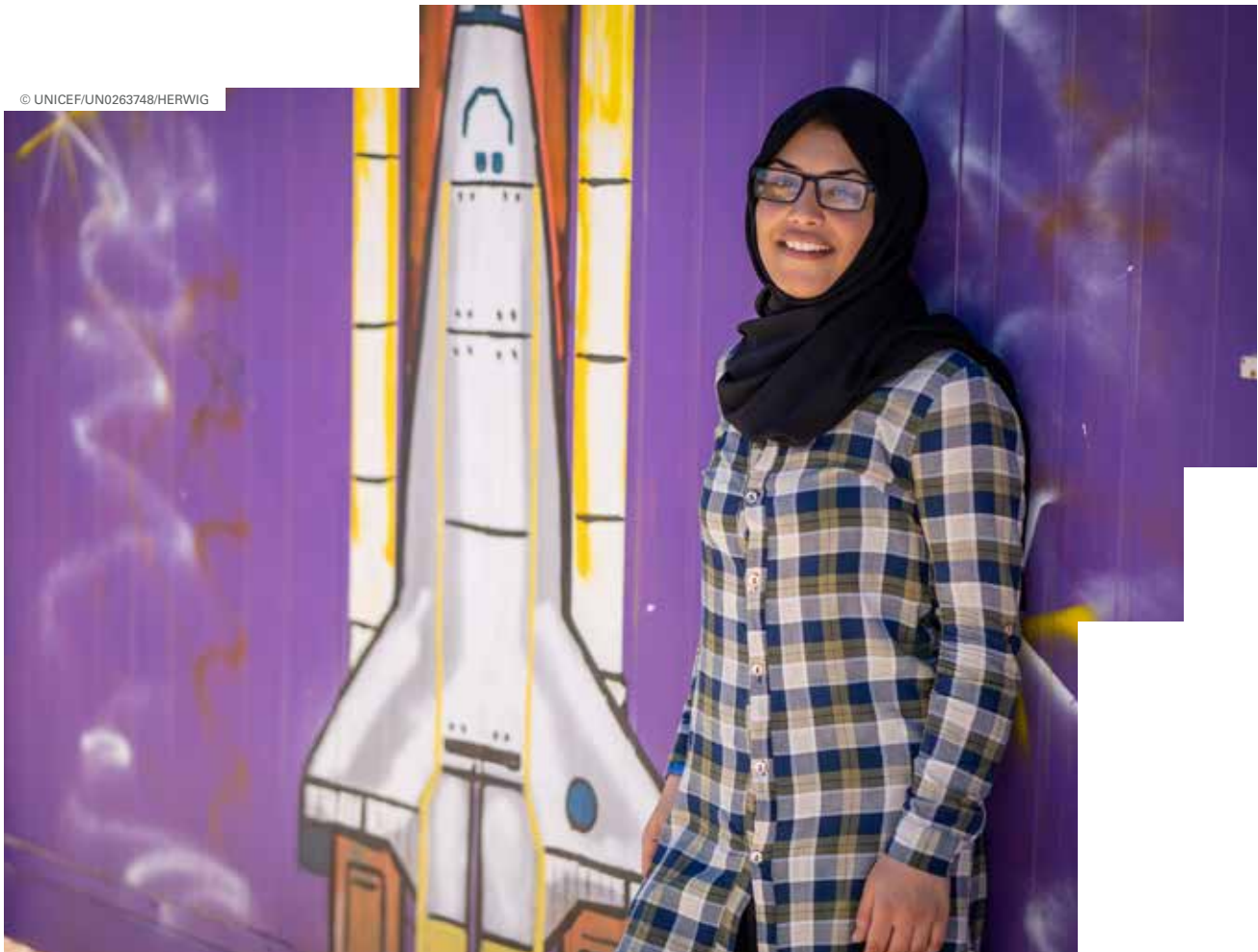
The lack of protection services was noted as leading to more conflict with the law. For girls, this contributes to unsafe environments that limit their ability to go to school. Children and young people emphasized the need for individualized psychosocial support, and safe spaces to address sensitive issues – including gender-specific spaces.

Finally, they expressed the need for opportunities to relax, play and engage in creative pursuits, enabled by facilities like gyms and playgrounds, sports equipment and other recreational materials, and opportunities for arts and leisure.

## EDUCATION IS A CRITICAL PRIORITY FOR CRISIS-AFFECTED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

Children and young people in crisis-affected contexts talked about the urgent need to better support their education and skills development. They called for easier access to school as well as to the supplies they need to take advantage of learning opportunities – especially internet access, with a stable connection, and resources like laptops. Financial support and economic opportunities for families, they said, are critical to enabling children and young people to go to school and learn, and for preventing negative coping mechanisms like child marriage and child labour. Furthermore, education can enhance social cohesion by increasing exposure to different outlooks on life.

Children and young people expressed that education should teach life skills that can enhance everyday life, and should be more values-based rather than focusing on rote learning. They also called for more investment in vocational training, which is especially important for those who may not enjoy classroom learning or don't want to go to university. Vocational training would help empower young people and their families, enabling them to earn their own incomes and reducing reliance on aid or on the worst forms of child labour. They also mentioned that schools should help prepare children and their communities for disasters, with regular drills, warning sirens and awareness raising.



They also mentioned the need to support the education of children and young people with disabilities, including development of life skills. This will require specially trained staff – as well as peer support, as children may benefit from opportunities to learn from their peers. They urged the creation of learning opportunities that would be free to families of children with disabilities, who are already spending money to create environments that accommodate their children.

### **CRISIS-AFFECTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH FACE HIGH RISKS OF ABUSE, EXPLOITATION AND HARMFUL PRACTICES, INCLUDING CHILD MARRIAGE AND CHILD LABOUR AS NEGATIVE COPING MECHANISMS.**

Both girls and boys noted the prevalence of negative coping mechanisms that endanger their well-being and compromise their ability to get an education. Families affected by acute poverty and unmet basic needs, for instance in IDP camps, may send their children to work as a way to survive – and children, meanwhile, may work because they want to help their families. Adolescent boys are highly vulnerable to some of the worst form child labour, including being sent to work (or beg) on the streets, on farms, or even overseas, often in exploitative, hazardous conditions. Meanwhile, families may marry off their daughters in an attempt to ensure their safety. Harmful traditional practices and cultural norms also contribute to the prevalence of these negative coping mechanisms.

### **NORMS AND STRUCTURES NEED TO CHANGE TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING IN CRISIS-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES.**

“Whenever we want to say something, the influential people tell us that children are meant to eat, not to speak.” (GIRL, 18, AFGHANISTAN)



Children and young people expressed that they have a unique understanding of their own situations and needs. Many are eager to have active roles in emergency response and in changing their lives and communities – but they need support, and often that starts with changing attitudes that are not supportive of their participation. In some case, young people’s input is not valued by influential community members. Social stereotyping is another barrier to young people’s participation; children said they might even hesitate to approach teachers or counsellors due to their socioeconomic background.

Children and young people called for measures to raise awareness – including among children and their parents – of children’s right to engage in decision-making on matters that affect them. Other concrete measures to support young people’s participation include establishing youth committees, building children’s capacities to engage, and including them in meetings and decision-making processes pertaining to community affairs. Self-managed groups are key to strengthening the autonomy and voices of adolescents, as are spaces to organize, make demands and establish mutual support.



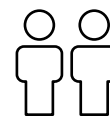
In schools, children and young people should be consulted on matters that directly affect them, like books and syllabus changes. Governments should create children’s committees in schools, in which children can share their views, which would then be conveyed back to their governments.

**AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT ARE KEY TO BUILDING PEACE.**

Children and young people feel that peace comes from respect and acceptance, while inequality lies at the root of many conflicts by creating competition that limits everyone’s development. Building peace requires an understanding of local contexts, norms and traditions in all their complexities. It also requires spaces where people can come together to discuss their differences, lack of tolerance and diversity, and discrimination against minorities – and resolve these issues in a respectful manner.



# UNICEF ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Children and young people want UNICEF to:

## **RAISE MORE AWARENESS ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, ESPECIALLY THEIR RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION.**

UNICEF should work with governments and schools to raise awareness of children's rights; more awareness of the right to participation is needed to give young people the legitimacy to act and participate in strategic discussions.

It is also critical to educate families on children's rights and well-being, and teach caregivers how to create a dialogue with children. This is important so that families understand children's needs, and so that they allow them to participate in extracurricular activities and engage in civic life. Children and young people suggested having radio programmes to reach their parents and caregivers.

To raise awareness among young people themselves, a dedicated UNICEF or website platform for two-way communication with children and young people could provide means to get information and ask questions about rights, and to report complaints.

## **STRENGTHEN YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECT ENGAGEMENT WITH UNICEF, INCLUDING BY PARTNERING DIRECTLY WITH YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND YOUNG LEADERS, AND EXPANDING UNICEF YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM.**

UNICEF needs to reinforce its direct contact with children, young people and their families. Children and young people who participate in UNICEF programmes are not just beneficiaries, but actors.

UNICEF should more systematically hear from children and young people – through more surveys, polls, and workshops like in the current consultation, and also local-level committees or advisory groups – to find out what they need, and incorporate that information in programme design. This will help make solutions and programmes better adapted to local and regional characteristics and traditions, and to the economic and social capabilities of families. It is critical that UNICEF maintains close working relationships with youth movements, youth leaders and youth-led groups, and seek their expertise in creating solutions. Youth representatives or ambassadors should have more responsibility.



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Participants in the consultations informing the Global Outlook 2025 noted that young people really trust UNICEF’s value and brand, but will also hold UNICEF accountable as it increases organizational investment in working both with and for young people. They also emphasized that young people are not a monolith, and urged UNICEF to explore disaggregating the diverse roles that young people can play as UNICEF partners.

### **ACT AS A BRIDGE TO EXPAND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY DECISIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES, CREATING AN ECOSYSTEM FOR YOUTH ACTION AND PARTICIPATION.**

UNICEF is sometimes the only means for children and young people to participate in policy-making, and can act as a bridge between children and young people, and the governments and development programmes that serve them. The organization can create more spaces where children’s and young people can voice their opinions and engage on policies and programmes.

Children and young people feel that youth representatives should be included in decision-making bodies at the local, national and international levels, and youth councils should have more decision-making power. UNICEF should support the creation of youth councils in all countries, as well as an International Youth Council with national representatives.



UNICEF should work with governments to further facilitate young people’s access to decision-making spaces by including youth in political campaigns, making child-friendly summaries of public debates, and setting up youth polls so that those who cannot yet vote can still make their voices heard.

### **GUARANTEE SPACE FOR THE VOICES OF GIRLS, BOYS AND THE MOST MARGINALIZED AND EXCLUDED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, INCLUDING THOSE IN RURAL AND ISOLATED COMMUNITIES AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES.**

UNICEF should take affirmative action to make sure that all participation opportunities are inclusive and represent the most vulnerable children and young people – and make sure governments do so as well. All engagement and consultation activities, as well as training and capacity building, should be accessible to children with disabilities.

### **HELP CONNECT ENGAGED YOUNG PEOPLE AND RAISE THEIR VISIBILITY.**

“UNICEF, having an international network, could connect and refer youth organizations to each other. They could learn from each other’s experiences.”

(GIRL, 21, PHILIPPINES)



UNICEF should create more platforms for children and young people to share ideas, experiences and best practices for youth action. UNICEF communications should be tailored to children and young people, using child-friendly language and formats, and be disseminated through the channels they frequent.

UNICEF should disseminate more evidence of what young people are doing and the impact they are having, to raise the visibility of youth engagement, including that of UNICEF youth volunteers. Youth action should also be made more visible in the media, and young leaders should more often serve as spokespersons for UNICEF.

### **BUILD YOUNG PEOPLE’S CAPACITIES TO ENGAGE AND SUPPORT THEIR COLLECTIVE ACTION.**

“Young people must be taught to speak out. UNICEF should commit to be a driving force.” (BOY, 19, FRANCE)



UNICEF should organize more trainings and mentorships for youth representatives and volunteers, so that they can gradually take on more responsibilities. Children and young people called upon UNICEF to support peer learning spaces in which they can feel included and safe to speak up, obtain accessible information and resources, hear testimonies and share different stories, and learn from each other.



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To support youth-led organizations and projects, UNICEF should develop a toolkit for action that young people can adapt and share to build on good practices, rather than starting from scratch every time they want to implement a new project. UNICEF should also work more to support employability and entrepreneurship, as young people need more opportunities to set up businesses and launch their professional lives.

### **PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES TO PROMOTE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND ENSURE THAT SCHOOLS RESPECT CHILD RIGHTS.**

UNICEF should partner more intensively with schools and universities as a cost-effective way to reach large numbers of children and young people, and to raise awareness of the engagement opportunities available to them.

UNICEF should promote the role of schools in raising awareness of child rights, including through curricula and by engaging youth ambassadors and other specific programmes to foster engagement through schools. Some possibilities mentioned include school clubs on human rights and citizenship, and UNICEF funding for youth projects, for instance through competitions. Schools should encourage student volunteerism and civic engagement, while student representation on school councils should ensure that young voices are reflected in school decision-making. A UNICEF charter or label for schools could facilitate their commitment to foster child rights and participation.



UNICEF should also encourage schools to have spaces for conflict resolution, and teachers should be trained on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF partnerships with schools should also help create more platforms and tools for distance learning.

### **ENHANCE YOUTH PARTICIPATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, WITH BOTH CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT.**

Close partnerships with grassroots associations, local leaders, faith-based organizations, civil society and local authorities are critical, because these local actors are closest to families and children, including the most marginalized. Participants in the Global Outlook 2025 consultations also urged UNICEF to prioritize local solutions in funding, capacity-building and partnerships.

Children and young people emphasized that UNICEF should ensure that the organizations it partners with share common goals and have a positive impact on society. It should also help connect various organizations that promote children’s rights, for instance by creating a shared data center.

UNICEF should promote the engagement of young people with NGOs, including as volunteers, and work with volunteer groups, media and community communication channels (like radio) to disseminate information and opportunities to engage in policy dialogue.

UNICEF should build spaces where young people can work with local partners to solve problems, and create stronger links with local authorities such as local or municipal councils so that they consult with young people systematically in their decision-making, and facilitate their access to health, education, MHPSS and other services. Child-Friendly Cities should create youth city councils that link closely to city councils.



# MAKING UNICEF A CHILD- AND YOUTH-POWERED ORGANIZATION

UNICEF's new Strategic Plan 2022-2025 responds to the concerns and expectations of children and young people, as expressed in these consultations.

The organization has now made climate change, a great concern among children and young people, a cross-cutting programme, and will take a whole-organization approach to addressing it. UNICEF will focus on protecting children and their communities from the impacts of climate change by building their climate resilience and providing climate-smart services. The new Strategic Plan will strive to use UNICEF's capabilities to support children and youth through climate education, participation in community action and meaningful participation in policy development, recognizing that the best hope for a sustainable planet is if environmental sustainability becomes the new 'business as usual' for future generations.

Mental health will be strengthened and incorporated within each of the Strategic Plan Goal Areas; an important step towards strengthening institutional capacity and accountability to respond to the MHPSS needs of children, adolescents and families around the world. It is now a key part of primary health care, in Goal Area 1, while Goal Area 2 will now make creating more supportive school environments a priority, and Goal Area 3 will continue to prioritize mental health and psychosocial support, building on decade-experience of integrating mental health in Child Protection work at UNICEF, and the dramatic expansion of work in this area during COVID-19.

UNICEF will take a transformational, intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination that addresses their underlying drivers and aims to transform structures and norms. Gender equality continues to be a cross-cutting programmatic priority, and UNICEF will now make disability rights one as well, to ensure that all its work promotes the inclusion and empowerment of children and young people with disabilities. Anti-racism will now be a guiding principle underlying all UNICEF's work, and the organization will begin to tackle racism and its impacts in programming as well as internally – to create an organization that contributes to global movements for social justice and better represents the world's children and young people.

UNICEF sees children and young people as its most powerful partners in galvanizing change, and will step up its engagement with them, and with the organizations they lead, to inform the design and delivery of its programmes. The organization will work to enhance the capacities of governments and service providers – as well as its own capacities – to engage with

children and young people and to create opportunities and platforms to ensure their meaningful participation in the decisions that affect their lives and their communities, at the global, regional, national and local levels. Meanwhile, the dramatic expansion seen by UNICEF's volunteer initiative since the pandemic has focused on building national-level cadres of youth volunteers, and UNICEF will continue to build on that.

Going forward, UNICEF will systematically engage children and young people throughout its work to realize the rights of children – in analyzing global and local trends, and developing programming, policy guidance, advocacy and communications. To ensure that UNICEF focuses on the issues that matter most to children and young people, and engages with them and their communities in line with their expressed needs and concerns, the organization will support platforms for young experts, activists and leaders to provide direct input to UNICEF strategies and programmes. This is the renewed ambition of UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 which will ensure UNICEF becomes a child- and youth-powered organization, meeting their needs and expectations for a better life and a better world.

**“I think that UNICEF should implement more projects and activities that involve children all around the globe. This way they can ensure that [children and young people] are happy, healthy, well-developed and prepared for their future.” (ROMANIA, 13-18 YEARS OLD)**

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ENGAGING  
CHILDREN AND  
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ON UNICEF'S  
STRATEGIC  
PLAN  
2022-2025