

CHILD-FOCUSED AGENCIES' WRITTEN INPUTS FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE ZERO DRAFT OF THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE (December 2023)

The Child-Focused Agencies are comprised of Childfund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, and World Vision. It is a critical partnership for joint advocacy to elevate children's rights and their voices at the UN, working together in pursuit of equality and the empowerment of all children.

We welcome the UN Secretary-General's ambitious proposal for a Summit of the Future, and Member States' intention to adopt a *Pact for the Future* at the Summit. This constitutes an opportunity to bolster efforts to advance the SDGs, including through financial reforms; the mainstreaming of child rights across the Summit's outcomes; the promotion and protection of human rights; the international peace and security architecture; and in science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation. This is also a key moment to recognize children and youth as two distinct groups¹ that must be included in the planning, follow up, monitoring and review, and outcomes of processes and policies that are designed to address their individual needs and rights for years to come.

To ensure the effectiveness, sustainability, and legitimacy of the *Pact for the Future* all stakeholders must have opportunities to meaningfully contribute and have their views incorporated to realize a participatory, inclusive, and transparent process. Civil society organizations, children and youth, and their own organizations and movements, must actively contribute to Summit of the Future processes, policies, and implementation to achieve a successful outcome.

This brief outline priority areas and concrete language suggestions for consideration during the drafting and negotiations on the *Pact for the Future*. These priority areas reflect the key recommendations endorsed by the Child-Focused Agencies.

The Pact for The Future

Chapeau

- **RATIONALE:** In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted and while advances in child rights have occurred, progress remains imbalanced and uneven, with those children who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination most impacted. A successful *Pact for the Future* requires an inclusive, intersectional, systematic and sustained approach to child rights across all chapters of the Pact, recognizing that children do not constitute a homogenous group but must be considered in their full diversity. This includes integrating a cross-cutting rights-based gender transformative, age responsive and disability-inclusive approach that prioritizes the diverse needs and challenges of all girls, boys, young women and

¹ Children are distinct rights holders (all persons under 18.) As a group of distinct rights holders under international law, distinct from 'youth' and 'young people' which describe a separate demographic with different, sometimes overlapping, rights, and distinct from 'future generations.'

young men, especially those most marginalized, when identifying addressing and responding to their needs. (Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: Child Rights Mainstreaming [2023])

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Reaffirming that States have the primary duty and responsibility to promote, respect, protect and fulfil all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of the child. Prioritize the needs of children living in extreme poverty, in humanitarian crises or on the move, particularly girls and children with disabilities (A/C.3/78/L.19/Rev.1, PP 21).
- Recognizing that the rights and needs of children in all their diversity are critical for achieving a “people-centered and rights-based” Pact. Ensuring meaningful participation of children and young people as current and future decision makers with the greatest affinity for future generations (Summit of the Future Policy Brief 1: To Think and Act for Future Generations - OUR COMMON AGENDA, A DEDICATED FORUM FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS [2023], pg 17).
- Reaffirming support for both financial and social aspects of the leave no one behind principle to ensure that the rights of children and youth are central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as they are critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations (Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13–16 July 2015; A/RES/69/313., I. A global framework for financing development post-2015, Para. 7).

(i) Chapter 1: Sustainable Development & Financing for Development

- **RATIONALE:** It is critical to invest in all children and youth, safeguard their rights and ensure that they grow up in a safe environment, free from all forms of violence, including neglect, abuse and exploitation, and through the elimination of all harmful practices in order to build sustainable and resilient societies (United Nations E/HLS/2018/1, Para. 17). Member States should employ a people-centered and rights-based approach to the international financial architecture and adhere to their commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda to secure a safe and sustainable future for children, fulfilling the pledge to leave no one behind.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
 - We will intensify and increase investment in children and youth, in all their diversity, as critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations, and will provide support to countries that face particular challenges in making the requisite investments in this area (Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13–16 July 2015; A/RES/69/313., I. A global framework for financing development post-2015, Para. 7).
 - We commit to a rights-based, child-centred, inclusive and equitable implementation of the 2030 Agenda by ensuring the promotion, respect, protection and fulfillment of the rights of all children, fulfilling our pledge to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first, in all policies, programs, budgeting, , and follow-up and review processes; and will employ inclusive, gender transformative, age responsive and disability inclusive approaches that prioritize the diverse and intersectional needs of the most marginalized children, especially

- girls, including, inter alia, those living in extreme poverty, children in humanitarian crises or on the move and those children who are structurally marginalized, ensuring that no child is left behind (Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13–16 July 2015; A/RES/69/313., I. A global framework for financing development post-2015, Para. 7).
- We will prioritize delivering social protection and essential public services for all children, in all of their diversity, as a national priority. Budget for sufficient funding to reach, inter alia, children living in extreme poverty, children with disabilities, children living in alternative care, migrant and refugee children, and those in conflict and post conflict situations to provide essential public services for all children, including health, education, energy, water and sanitation (Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13–16 July 2015; A/RES/69/313., I. A global framework for financing development post-2015, Para. 12).
 - We will promote gender equality and the rights and empowerment of all girls by adopting and strengthening sound policies, enforceable legislation and transformative actions to ensure their equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy and to eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination in all its forms. Focus on targeted actions and investments in the formulation and implementation of all financial, economic, environmental and social policies. Promote and invest in gender-responsive, quality, equitable and inclusive education, lifelong learning, reskilling, and vocational training and studies, and ensure that girls diversify their educational and occupational choices in emerging fields, such as science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, and information and communications technology, and acquire digital skills (E/CN.6/2023/L.3, Para. kk).

(ii) Chapter 2: International Peace and Security

- **RATIONALE:** Recommit to and implement the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with respect to international peace and security: Non-discrimination (Article 2); Best interest of the child (Article 3); Right to life survival and development (Article 6); and Right to be heard (Article 12); and abide by the laws of International Humanitarian Law, including its four principles on humanity, distinction, proportionality and military necessity (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 44/25 [1989]). "States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child" (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 44/25, Article 38 [1989]).
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
 - We will prioritize the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict, and fully incorporate post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programs and strategies. Member States and United Nations entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission and other parties concerned must ensure that the views of children are taken into account in programming activities and the creation of solutions throughout the conflict cycle. Remove barriers to children’s meaningful participation and facilitate consideration of their views in these processes as well as in efforts on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (S/RES/2427 [2018], OP 23).

- We recognize that children in situations of armed conflict can be especially vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence. Member States, relevant parts of the UN system, and international and regional bodies, within their respective mandates should work to develop and implement comprehensive policies and action plans that prevent and address grave violations against children (S/RES/2427 [2018], OP 39).
- We will ensure that the best interests of the child as well as the specific needs and vulnerabilities of girls be duly considered when planning and carrying out actions concerning children in situations of armed conflict (S/RES/2427 [2018], PP 11). Prioritize access to essential services during the conflict and post-conflict periods, including, inter alia, education and health, including sexual and reproductive health services. Member States, United Nations bodies and civil society should consider in particular the rights and unique needs of girls during conflict and provide remedies where they are prevented from participating in, inter alia, education and public life, due to gender and age-based discrimination they face. ([S/RES/2427 [2018], OP 14] and [Children and Armed Conflict, Annual Report of the Secretary General, Summary 2022; from report S/2023/363 - A/77/895]).

(iii) Chapter 3: Science, Technology and Innovation and Digital Cooperation

- **RATIONALE:** It is critical to highlight and recognize that digital technologies can offer increasing opportunities, build digital literacy skills, enhance education, and foster learning when children have access to internet and technology. For all children to realize these experiences, it requires expanded access and bridging the digital divide. Member States have a duty to legally “protect children from violence, both online and offline, in a manner consistent with their obligations under international law, including international human rights law, and to criminalize relevant conduct related to violence against children online and offline, including but not limited to forms of sexual exploitation and abuse of children (A/C.3/78/L.19/Rev.1, PP 19, PP 31, OP 10, OP 30, OP 53).
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
 - We will protect and fulfil the rights of all children, including those living in extreme poverty, in humanitarian crises or on the move, girls, and children with disabilities, to ensure that they have equal access to quality inclusive education, information in child-friendly and accessible formats, digital skills development, and affordable access to the internet and digital devices (A/C.3/78/L.1/Rev.1, OP 19).
 - We recognize that children face risks such as online sexual exploitation, economic exploitation, misinformation, harassment and hate speech, the promotion of or incitement to suicide or life-threatening activities, trafficking and abduction of children, and the recruitment of children to participate in criminal activities (CRC/C/GC/25 III. General principles, A. Non-discrimination, Para. 11, C. Right to life, survival and development, Para.14, XII. Special protection measures Paras. 112, 115).
 - We will ensure that national legislation on data protection and privacy is in accordance with international human rights obligations and allows law enforcement, social welfare and judicial authorities to conduct effective and appropriate investigations and prosecutions to

combat violations and abuses of the rights of the child, including against sexual exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence, in digital contexts (A/C.3/78/L.19/Rev.1, PP 19, PP 31, OP 10, OP 44, OP 57).

- We will ensure children’s meaningful participation and active consultation in the development of legislation, policies, programs, services and training on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment. Digital service providers should actively engage with children, applying appropriate safeguards, and give their views due consideration when developing products and services (CRC/C/GC/25, III. General principles; D. Respect for the views of the child, Para. 17).

(iv) Chapter 4: Youth and Future Generations

- **RATIONALE:** As children and adults do not experience life in the same manner, neither do children and youth. Children and youth are not a homogenous group but have unique needs and perspectives each that are essential to identifying, addressing, and solving issues at different stages throughout their development and transition to adulthood. *Article 12 of the CRC* affords children the right to have their views taken into account in decisions impacting their lives: “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...in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”²

“States must recognize and respect that present children, adolescents and youth occupy a proximate position to future generations, and must protect their rights to be heard and other participatory rights, including when advocating for human rights on behalf of themselves and future generations” (Maastricht Principles on The Human Rights of Future Generations 22. Participation and Representation, C, [2023]).

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
 - We will distinguish children and youth as two distinct groups of rights-holders with specific and sometimes overlapping needs. Children and youth are closest in time to generations still to come and thus occupy a unique position. They have an important role to play within this transition to long-term, multigenerational thinking. Accordingly, their perspectives and participation must be given special weight (Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations Preamble, VII. [2023]).
 - We will build the awareness, skills and capacity of adults, including parents and other caretakers, policy makers, educators, NGOs, and other decision-making stakeholders to provide support for children’s participation. Encourage intergenerational dialogue to address root causes that perpetuate social and cultural barriers to children’s participation.³
 - We will invest in children’s meaningful participation in civic discourse and decision-making by creating safe spaces and platforms for engagement, both in person and online, including by providing free and equitable access to the internet, the necessary technology, and the

² Joining Forces (2021). Children’s Right To Be Heard: We’re Talking Are You Listening? Policy Brief. <https://joining-forces.org/publications/childrens-right-to-be-heard/>.

³ Ibid, 11.

digital skills education children need in order to safely navigate the digital space. Facilitate children's access to age-appropriate and gender-responsive information, and build their capacity to gain the requisite skills, knowledge, leadership capabilities and confidence to share their views. Ensure that children are provided accountability and responses to their contributions and ideas.⁴

- We will ensure the respect, protection and fulfillment of the rights, empowerment and capacity-building of girls, including their full, meaningful, and inclusive participation in developing policies and programs, and determining resources that address their actual needs (E/CN.6/2023/L.3, Para. 78. Para. 54). Remove inequalities and discriminatory social norms that limit their enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms (E/CN.6/2023/ L.3, Para. 40).

⁴ Ibid, 11.