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Call to Action:

Ensuring an ambitious external dimension in the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child



unicef
for every child

Context

As the EU is developing its Strategy on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF calls on EU Institutions and Member States to ensure that the Strategy includes a strong external dimension.

This Call to Action is in line with the [Joint position paper](#) (adopted by a number of organisations promoting child rights) that presents a set of key principles as well as priorities and actions for the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, both inside and outside the EU.

The EU has helped to transform children's lives everywhere in the world. It has inspired legislative changes and policies to better protect and promote children's rights, it has funded actions, both within and outside of the EU, to offer better and fairer opportunities and outcomes for children, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the most widely ratified human rights treaty, progress has been tremendous, but challenges to the realization of all rights for all children remain- whether it is climate change, the COVID pandemic, conflicts,

irregular migration or economic crises. These global challenges, which often impact children first and foremost, threaten to reverse decades of gains and investments. Systemic and structural discrimination, including based on poverty, ethnicity, gender, place of birth, origin, religion etc., also persist and affect children's rights to access basic services and their ability to fully develop their potential.



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Therefore, there is a pressing need to refresh the urgency around the implementation of the CRC. The new EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child offers a unique opportunity to make child rights part of the political agenda of the EU, of its policies, actions and investments with a holistic, comprehensive and rights-based approach.

This new framework will translate the EU political commitments to child rights into a set of concrete objectives necessary for achieving results for all children everywhere, including by promoting more efficient coordination, implementation and monitoring of EU activities in this area.

The EU as a global champion for child rights: the rationale for a strong external dimension

Leveraging the EU voice to realise child rights and deliver on the 2030 Agenda

Delivering on the legal obligations articulated in the UNCRC and prioritizing the fulfilment of children's rights, including the education, protection, health and well-being of children constitutes the best and most impactful investment the international community can make to fulfil the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs)– for children themselves, but also for peace, human security and sustainable development.

The UNCRC and the SDGs go hand-in-hand: the successful implementation of the SDGs contributes to the realization of children's rights – and vice-versa. In an international context where human rights, including all child rights – social, economic, cultural, political and civil- are increasingly questioned, and where misinformation hampers joint action, the global leadership of the EU is more important than ever.

The EU's voice and advocacy on child rights in the UN, with member states and in other global fora, will remain essential for the years to come. The Strategy will provide a holistic framework and approach to the EU external action.

Ensuring a comprehensive and coherent approach in internal and external EU policies

The EU has already developed many tools, guidelines and policies related to children, but those are not necessarily connected, nor comprehensive. The universal child rights agenda requires the international community and the EU to address all child rights across all countries, whether they are high, middle or low income, building on the key principles of a rights-based approach.

Child rights have no boundaries and thus, the EU needs a systematic and coherent approach to promote and defend children's rights inside and outside Europe, in line with the UNCRC and 2030 Agenda.



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Addressing new challenges and opportunities for children

New challenges and opportunities are emerging that have a direct impact on children's rights and wellbeing. Most of them are global phenomena and cannot be solved by one country alone or without partners.

A concerted effort is required across borders to address those challenges and take advantage of the new opportunities, from artificial intelligence to life-saving innovations and the social media; the impact of climate change on children and their role as agents of change; children in migration; the increasing impact of armed conflicts on children; and the desire and ability of children and adolescents to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

EU's investment in children is key and substantive

In some developing countries, children make up more than 50% of the population. Globally, 1 in 4 children live in countries affected by humanitarian crises. With research showing that a healthy, well-educated population is critical to building stable, peaceful and prosperous societies, children are the demographic with the potential to make the most transformative changes in their lives and in their societies.

Investment in human development virtually overlaps with investment in children's health, education, social and child protection. The first and second decades of life are both critically important and require different types of intervention.



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Investing in early childhood to ensure that all children survive, have adequate food, are protected against violence and exploitation, and have access to a quality and inclusive education, can reap long-term benefits. Sustaining the investment in the second decade has the potential to break long-standing cycles of poverty, discrimination and violence.

As the pandemic is potentially rolling back decades of progress for children, investing in children is key. This investment must ensure that no child is left behind.

A recent Compendium of EU financed actions outside the EU relevant to children's rights from January 2015 to October 2019 identified at least 3,351 EU-supported actions relevant to children's rights, in 149 developing countries and territories, for a total EU contribution of €9,547 million.

Most importantly, EU investment can mobilise and trigger financing by governments and the private sector.

Key recommendations

Political outcomes

1. A Team Europe commitment to deliver on child rights and the 2030 Agenda

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child should be binding for EU institutions and EU Member States, contributing to the realization of children's rights, and the achievement of relevant SDGs (and their indicators). This should align with the 2020- 2024 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce a binding commitment for the EU institutions and EU Member States to work together towards delivering on the Strategy.

2. Bringing children's voices into decision-making processes

Children are often an overlooked constituency, yet they often have a strong understanding of their own situation and needs, and their right to participate in decisions affecting them is a key principle of the UNCRC. Engaging children on policy that impacts them is critical to ensure the meaningful, sustainable impact of decision-making.

EU policy and programming must recognize and support this right through dedicated funds and safe space for inclusive child participation, including by those children most vulnerable or marginalized.

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce specific child participation on decisions affecting them in consultation mechanisms established by the European Commission (e.g. child-friendly consultations during the programming exercise, participation of children in relevant policy and human rights dialogues) and the European Parliament (e.g. child-friendly consultation during the development of relevant new policy or legislation).

Operational outcomes

3. Mainstream child rights across EU policies and instruments

Mainstreaming child rights means ensuring the integration of child-focused objectives, targets and indicators to sectors and local priorities in EU policies and programming. It promotes a ‘child-rights lens analysis’, helping to design solutions, allocate resources, identify risks and constraints, and monitor progresses towards child rights’ realisation. **UNICEF recommends that:**

- Child rights reporting be included in political dialogues, including human rights dialogues;
- Child rights analysis be incorporated in the formulation of programmes for all priority sectors;
- Age-disaggregated data (in addition to disaggregation along other vulnerabilities such as gender or disability) be used throughout the programme cycle;
- Child rights expertise be available and used timely at all stages of the programme cycle.

4. Measuring EU investments in children

The development and application of a Child Marker in the allocation of Commission’s budgets would allow EU institutions and

partners to measure and monitor EU investment on child rights. It can contribute to identifying gaps between policy and financial commitments and incentivize efforts to close them. By enabling financial reporting, it would allow to recognize the considerable EU investment in child rights globally.

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce a specific child marker in the programming of the 2021-2027 Multi-annual Financial Framework



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5. Targeting annual spending on child-specific outcomes

Ensuring that at least 25% of annual spending of the geographic programmes of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and humanitarian aid is focused on child-specific outcomes, from early childhood through the second decade of life.

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce a specific annual budget target of at least 25% on child rights-specific outcomes.

6. Protecting children from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse

A comprehensive and a cohesive approach to child protection in all situations, including prevention and early intervention, to tackle all

forms of violence against children, brings the most sustainable results for them and societies.

Child protection and the strengthening of child protection systems to address all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation is required in all contexts.

A systems approach is key to also ending harmful practices, including child labour, child-trafficking, gender-based violence, Female Genital Mutilation, early-and forced child marriage and institutionalisation of children.

RECOMMENDATION: Incorporate specific assistance to strengthen child protection and related systems in all situations. System strengthening should include prevention and protection measures through the provision of appropriate services for children and their families, as well as addressing harmful norms.

7. Protecting children in emergencies, disasters and humanitarian response

Climate change, health crises and conflicts have a tremendous detrimental impact on children, especially the most vulnerable ones. They are exacerbated by socio-economic inequities, discriminations and inadequate national systems to prevent and respond to these crises.

The destruction of schools, medical facilities and WASH infrastructure, food insecurity, and extreme violence have a direct impact on the survival, development and protection of children. Around the world, more than 30 million children have been displaced by conflict. Many are still enrolled in armed forces and armed groups.

Ensuring a continuum of services between humanitarian responses and development is essential for the effective protection and care of children, incorporating a long-term, age-sensitive and gender-responsive approach to children's rights and well-being.



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RECOMMENDATION: Incorporate and combine humanitarian actions and development support to ensure the continuity of access to education, nutrition, health (including mental health) and protection services to all children before, during and after an emergency. Support risk preparedness, including climate action and adaptation, in social sectors to contribute to the resilience of children, their families and communities.