

## AU-EU Youth Summit UNICEF side-event: Concept note

### Uniting in the Fight Against Climate Change: A dialogue between youth and leaders

#### What?

As part of the various side-events organised by the EU in the lead up to the African Union-European Union (AU-EU) Heads of States Summit in February 2022 in Brussels, UNICEF aims to organize a **virtual debate** that pulls together young people from Africa and Europe to their experiences of climate change, discuss solutions with policy-makers and develop recommendations for Heads of States.

This debate will be aligned with the core priorities of the AU-EU Summit: climate, education, digitalization, governance, peace & security, with a focus on the Sahel. Climate change will be the entry point to address the other topics that are interconnected with climate change.

#### The context: The AU-EU summit

The 6<sup>th</sup> AU-EU Summit will take place on **17-18<sup>th</sup> February 2022 in Brussels**, Belgium, when African and European Heads of States and Governments will meet to determine joint priorities for their common future. In the run up to the Summit, dialogues, consultations and other fora and events will be organised with African and European stakeholders to help refine the way forward.

In the weeks preceding the Summit, the EU foresees online activities with and for young people, which will culminate in an in-person/virtual hybrid Youth summit on 15<sup>th</sup> February, whose objective is to feed into the Heads of States declaration.

#### The concept: a dialogue with and for young citizens from Africa and Europe

UNICEF will organize a side-event with young Africans and Europeans, building on the joint EU-AU-UNICEF partnership for the "[Your Voice, Your Future](#)" Campaign, the [Young people's voices from the Sahel's original initiative](#)<sup>1</sup> and other recent joint initiatives. This side-event will be led and financed by UNICEF and promoted by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), DG CLIMA and the AUC.

The spirit of this debate is meant to be **inclusive and democratic**, avoiding speeches and long monologues. The dialogue will be based on personal experiences, facts and evidence, with direct interaction with some European and African policy-makers, leading to recommendations from young people.

#### How will it work?

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<sup>1</sup> This initiative brought together 100 young participants from the 10 Sahelian countries on the 20th of November 2021 in an online live public debate.

- The debate will include **15 to 20 young spokespersons**, with a balanced representation from Africa and Europe, European & African senior representatives (Ministers or equivalent), and celebrities (TBC).
- It will be **max. 1h30** long in a **virtual** format, allowing all the participants to follow through **online streaming**
- The main thematic entry point will be **climate change** and its impact on areas of importance to young people, such as: education & jobs, digital divide, governance, peace & security (these issues will be reflected in the agenda).
- **Ahead of the debate**, an online encounter bringing all European and African young people from the different initiatives will be organized, and two preparatory sessions will be scheduled at country or regional level. The selected young people will also share information and opinions via the WhatsApp groups created for that occasion. Their inputs, work and contributions will be shared on a UNICEF dedicated webpage.
- The young people will then all together **issue a set of recommendations** on which they agree, which the assigned rapporteurs will share at the Youth Summit (in Brussels), and hopefully in the Heads of States Declaration.

### Building on recent initiatives to leveraging & amplify youth voices:

- The side-event will build on the work of the 10 groups already engaged in the [Young people's voices from the Sahel](#), and on the findings & recommendations of the [Your Voice, Your Future](#) campaign and the work of the U-Report ambassadors.
- In addition, the side-event will engage with young people living in European countries and engaged in past or ongoing EU initiatives: [EU Youth Sounding Board](#), [EU Climate Pact Ambassadors](#) and [European Youth Event \(EYE\)](#) climate activists.
- The recommendations issued by the young participants will be amplified and supported by UNICEF, in both their programmes and advocacy efforts.
- Building from this initiative, UNICEF will encourage the further expansion of youth engagement for climate action and ensure their voices reach policy makers at the highest levels.

***See Annexes below for more information on these initiatives.***

## Annex 1: Background information on the initiatives

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### 1. Young people's voices from the Sahel: an inclusive and democratic initiative

## The Sahel, a region in turmoil at the heart of climate issues

The combined effects of population growth, land degradation (deforestation, monoculture and overgrazing), reduced and erratic rainfall, and the lack of coherent environmental policies and clear development priorities have contributed to the transformation of a

significant part of the Sahel into drylands, leading to the degradation of soil and water resources. In the Sahel, the temperature is rising. These climate challenges particularly affect children in the region. [22 of the 24 countries in West and Central Africa are among the 30 countries most at risk for children](#), and children in 7 countries in the region are among the top 10 most affected by climate change worldwide.

## U-Report survey: do you see climate change as a...



UNICEF has successfully engaged young people of the 10 countries in the Sahel<sup>2</sup> in [inclusive public debates](#) on key issues affecting the region. Fitting in with UNICEF's global and regional strategies for youth participation, the event was the first in a series of debates to be held once a year.

### The objectives of the young people's voices from the Sahel initiative:

- Leverage the participation of young people and adolescents, and bring together those engaged as reporters, volunteers, activists, and those from the poorest households who have no easy access to connectivity and knowledge. The participants were encouraged to speak from their own experience of the issue.
- Provide young people with a microphone and inclusive space encourages a truly democratic debate: respectful and transparent, that offers equal treatment for every participant, and
- Amplify these voices to reach international institutions and stakeholders, through conclusions and recommendations.

### **Why does this matter?**

- Because the Sahel region is one of the world's poorest and most vulnerable regions in the world and is [bearing the brunt of the climate crisis](#) (global warming, water scarcity, floods...) even though on the least CO2-emitting region in the world. At the heart of UNICEF's priorities in West and Central Africa, the Sahel is 'young'. More than 230 million of its people are under 24 years old, 60 per cent of the population, who want to be gamechangers for their region. These voices deserve to be heard and acted upon. These public debates call for collective intelligence as a pathway to build sustainable solutions together.
- [Worldwide, young people are the most vulnerable](#) to climate change-related disruptions. But despite representing over half of the world's population, the [voices of young people are left unheard](#) or unheeded by decision-makers. Looking for more meaningful avenues for participation, young people have formed external lobbying groups and have engaged in climate activism. However, even such spaces are unsafe. The World Resources Institute has reported that ["environmental defenders across the world face threats, attacks, or fatal violence for](#)

<sup>2</sup> According to UNISS definition: Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Cameroon, Nigeria and Senegal

[protecting their land, rivers, forests, and communities from large corporations, paramilitary groups and their own governments.”](#)

### **Who are the Young people’s voices from the Sahel?**

The initiative has gathered 10 young people aged 8 to 25 years in each of the 10 Sahelian countries. These young participants were selected either through digital invitations to candidates or through UNICEF frontline workers and partners who were able to identify them in the field. Each group has a balanced representation of girls and boys, urban and rural, educated and out-of-school, connected and less connected young people to guarantee a true representation of young people from the Sahel.

#### *How did the young people engage?*

Thanks to the UNICEF network at the country level, the young participants were provided both with child and adolescent-friendly documentation on climate change in the Sahel and guidance on how to participate in a public debate. Access to connectivity was provided, and mentorship between more connected and educated and less educated and connected young people was put in place and encouraged. The young participants were asked to share their own experience of climate change, to document this issue at their community level, and to share within the group, in three sub-meetings to be prepared and trained organized as follows:

1. What do I know about the climate change? (acquire the minimum knowledge on the topic)
2. What do I think about climate change? (build their own opinion in the issues)
3. What do I have to say about climate change? (express this opinion in the live debate)

#### *The climax: a 2:30 hours online live public debate*

Celebrities and young activists were part of the virtual live debate:

- Angélique Kidjo and Smarty brought their support to the young people’s voices from the Sahel initiative
- Asalfo (Magic System) participated together with the young group in Ouagadougou
- Mitzy Tan (young climate activist from Philippines) sent them a support video message
- Oladosu Adenike (eco-feminist from Nigeria and the initiator of the Fridays For Future and ILeadClimate movements in Nigeria) was one of the speakers
- Arona Diedhou, IPCC expert and editor of the next 2023 report gave an overview of climate change in the Sahel
- Djibry Niang, Director of the Senegalese environmental NGO "Jeunes Volontaires pour l'environnement" and CEO of Green Labs, a green incubator presented actions and recommendations
- Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Special Coordinator for the UN Secretary for the Sahel opened the debate in a dialogue with a 8 years’ old young girl from Mali
- Juan Gomez, a renowned journalist (Radio France Internationale) was the moderator of the live debate.

## **2. “Your Voice, Your Future” campaign**

In 2020, UNICEF, the European Union and the African Union have joined forces to empower young people, so their voices are heard as the partnership between Africa and Europe is redefined. Through four digital polls launched on U-Report, young people aged between 14 and 35 years old on both continents had the opportunity to share their opinion on key issues concerning them and raise their voice.

The chosen topics were:

- green transition, including climate change and protection of the environment;
- digital transformation;
- sustainable economic growth, including investments, business climate, trade, job creation, education and skills;
- governance, peace and security.

**Over 450,000 young voices from Europe, Africa and diaspora**, provided policy makers with key insights to shape their future and that of their communities, contributing to define the future partnership priorities between the EU and Africa.

### **#YourVoiceYourFuture CAMPAIGN & REPORT**

In order to better connect youth in Europe and Africa, as well as raise awareness and engagement around the joint U-Report initiative, a social/digital media campaign was launched between July and September 2020, which resulted in the solid participation of over 450,000 young people across the two continents. The campaign consisted of multiple activations on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, etc.), launching the U-Report polls and asking young audiences to join.

The full results of the report are published as a digital report ["#YourVoiceYourFuture - Turning challenges into solutions"](#).

### **3. European Youth event: Stories of young people on the front lines of the climate crisis**

[The European Youth Event \(EYE\)](#) is held every two years to bring together thousands of young people from all over the EU and beyond, to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, to shape and share their ideas on the future of Europe. It is a unique opportunity for 16 to 30-year olds to interact both online and in-person, to inspire each other and exchange their views with experts, activists, influencers and decision-makers, right at the heart of European democracy.

UNICEF took part in EYE2021, supporting young people to share their stories on the impact of climate change.

A major criticism of the climate movement in recent years has been its lack of inclusivity, with the voices of young people from the global south under-represented in global media and advocacy efforts. The session organized by UNICEF aimed to address this divide, by “passing the mic” to youth advocates in the global south, and providing them with a platform to share their stories – and encourage other youth advocates to take climate action.

The event featured young activists fighting on the front lines of the climate crisis, from Europe and the global-south:

- Mitzi Jonelle Tan, UNICEF ambassador and youth climate activist from the Philippines

- Tori Tsui, Intersectional Climate Activist, Hong Kong
- Adelaide Charlier, a climate activist and UNICEF youth ambassador from Belgium
- Siatra Msandu, U-Report Ambassador from Zimbabwe
- Cyril Otabil, U-Report Ambassador from Ghana

The session aimed to show that climate change isn't an illusion – but that is real and happening now. It affects us all, albeit disproportionately. The youth activists discussed the successes and challenges they have experienced and offered advice to other young budding climate activists on how to make an impact.

The event linked to and reinforced existing UNICEF climate initiatives, UNICEF's global Climate Declaration, the Your Voice Your Future climate poll and the Children's Climate Risk Index, calling on leaders to take urgent action on behalf of young people.

In the session, Siatra Msandu, U-Report Ambassador from Zimbabwe, and Cyril Otabil, U-Report Ambassador from Ghana, participated in a discussion to share the challenges related to climate advocacy, advice on climate actions, and findings of the "Your Voice Your Future" U-Report poll on climate launched in July 2020, in collaboration with the European Union and African Union.