



for every child



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 2024

DECISIVE ELECTIONS FOR **CHILDREN & YOUNG
PEOPLE** IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WORLD



UNICEF REPRESENTATION
TO EU INSTITUTIONS

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Since the adoption of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, progress has been made in almost all child rights global indicators around the world on the back of efforts by governments, donors, international agencies, civil society, and others. Yet there have been worrying signs of slowing progress in the past decade. The promise to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has suffered a further setback from the COVID-19 pandemic and has left the world short of meeting targets at global

and national levels as we reach the mid-point of the goals.

In the short term (2023–2024) the current “polycrisis” -multiple, simultaneous crises that are strongly interdependent- will continue to exert a harsh toll on children and adolescents. The slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, heightened conflict, a cost-of-living crisis, racism, discrimination, gender inequality, migration and displacement, wear heavily on children’s physical

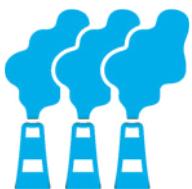


15 million

No. of children in the EU who are living in income poverty¹

9 million

No. adolescents in Europe living with a mental disorder²



1 billion

No. of children living in countries of extremely high-risk to climate and environmental shocks³

ca. two-thirds

Percentage of 10-year-olds globally estimated to be unable to read and understand a simple text⁴



¹. UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight | Research Brief | June 2023. ².The State of the World's Children Report 2021.
³. UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), 2021. ⁴. <https://www.unicef.org/learning-crisis>

and psychological well-being. Investments in children are required to protect them from these harms and recoup losses. Yet there is limited prioritization of social spending in fiscal space discussions and considerations, particularly in contexts of economic distress and in a growing number of low- and middle-income countries.

In the longer-term, various trends pose risks for children: weak global economic growth may result in the shrinking of investments for children and young people, while leading to an increase in child poverty. Geopolitical strains, ongoing conflicts, climate change and humanitarian crises will gravely threaten the lives and well-being of millions of children. Attention among the global superpowers to their own affairs is likely to be diverted from the needs of millions of children living in poverty, conflict and insecurity.

The decisions of the European Union (EU) – its legislation, policy, practices and funding - have an

enormous impact on children's lives inside and outside the European Union. The last decade has witnessed significant progress in Europe's commitment to child rights, most recently exemplified by the adoption of the first ever European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022). Important elections in Europe in 2023 and 2024 will determine the course of action that the EU and its member states will take. Among those, the June 2024 European Parliament elections, and the composition of the next European Commission, will be key for the adoption of new policies, reforms and investments supporting the child rights agenda.

Taking into account the situation of children in the EU and the rest of the world and the EU's ambition to fight poverty, reduce inequalities, adapt to climate change, and uphold human rights, UNICEF has **three main messages** for European political parties in the next European Parliament elections:



ca. 67 million

No. of children globally that missed out entirely or partially on routine immunization from 2019 to 2021⁵

1.46 billion

No. of children under 15 globally missing out on critical social protection provisions⁶



over a third

No. of young people in 30 countries that report being cyberbullied⁷

5. State of the World's Children Report 2023.

6. IIL & UNICEF joint report on social protection for children https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_869602.pdf

7. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children-online>



#1 CHAMPION CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The EU must continue to champion and set high standards for children's rights in its internal and external actions to fight child poverty and ensure social protection; address the learning crisis and transform education; ensure children are healthy and well nourished; and protect children from all on-line and off-line forms of abuse and exploitation, and from the impact of the climate crisis.

1 The EU must put child rights at the heart of its sustainable development agenda and the acceleration of actions towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Priority must be given to reaching the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children – children living in poverty, children affected by conflict and the climate crisis, children with disabilities, children on the move and in all these areas, maintain a sharp focus on girls.

2 Child-sensitive national social protection is key to protect children from multi-deprivations, including through the financially-resourced European-wide expansion of the European Child Guarantee. Fighting inter-generational poverty starts with children.

3 In its internal and external actions, children's health –including immunization– and nutrition should remain a priority. The EU should more boldly promote the mental health

of children and adolescents and prioritize its financing, as it is essential to learning, leading healthy lives and transitioning from childhood to adulthood.

4 As children are spending more time online than ever before, all EU legislation and policies relating to online use (including those for artificial intelligence) must be designed with the rights of children and young people in mind. This includes ambitious legislation on the protection of children against all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation, hate speech and cyberbullying and programmes that empower children online, including media literacy.

5 In its migration and asylum policies and legislation, the EU must uphold the "best interests of the child" principle in line with the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- 6** The EU should continue to enlist the support of businesses in upholding children's rights within the EU and the external actions of businesses with headquarters in the EU, through ambitious child-sensitive legislation on Corporate Sustainable Due Diligence.
- 7** In all its partnership with various parts and regions of the world, child rights should be an overarching concern. Child rights should continue to be central to negotiation and pre-

accession assistance to EU candidate countries and potential candidates in transforming their societies, policies and legal systems. The EU should expand its human rights dialogues with non-EU countries and ensure child rights remain at their core. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child should be a key tool in those discussions. The multi-annual indicative programmes implemented by the EU Delegations around the world should consider the situation of children and support actions to advance child rights in partnership countries.



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#2 MAKE THE MONEY WORK FOR CHILDREN

The current level of investment in Europe's internal and global actions will not be sufficient to respond to challenges and provide children in the EU and globally with the opportunities to live in the world they want. European money must work for children.

8 The current global needs have long outpaced the available and foreseen EU's multi-annual budget for the Neighbourhood and the World (Heading 6). The EU budget must contribute to accelerating the realization of children's rights under the Sustainable Development Goals. We ask to ringfence current allocations: for human development (20%), in particular for education (10%), as well as for child-sensitive climate adaptation (30%). The EU's multi-annual financial framework (reviewed in 2023/2024 and the new framework as of 2027) must explicitly prioritize children, especially the most disadvantaged and excluded. A Child Marker would allow the EU to monitor its external financing across its international financial instruments.

9 Flexible funding, particularly in the form of multi-year and unearmarked or softly earmarked funding should be the norm rather than the exception in all EU funding to United Nations agencies. Such funding allows for greater flexibility and timeliness in response, greater relevance to evolving needs of populations, and greater ability to uphold human rights norms and standards. Attention should shift from a focus on the implementation of activities to assessing performance against high level results at national and community levels, for both humanitarian and development responses.

10 The EU must support the creation of innovative financial instruments, without compromising on aid principles, building upon promising initiatives underpinned by risk transfer solutions, such as in the case of disease eradication or the protection of children from natural hazards.



#3 STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE FOR CHILDREN

The rolling out of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child calls for stronger governance across European Union Institutions - especially the Commission and the Parliament - in support of the rights of children, including their participation.

11 The European Parliament should establish a more sustainable body to ensure children's rights are a key consideration in all matters that affect them and discussed at the Parliament.

12 The European Commission shall establish an institutional body at the highest level, with appropriate resources, to ensure that child rights are mainstreamed across the work of Commissioners and related Directorates, from policy development to monitoring and evaluation. Such a body would also ensure that participation of children, including the most vulnerable and excluded, is embedded at all planning stages.

13 All EU Delegations should establish Youth Sounding Boards, in line with the Youth Action Plan. Participation should also build on and be coherent with the EU Child Participation Platform to ensure that it becomes a safe, meaningful, and inclusive tool for participation for all children including the most vulnerable and excluded.

14 EU decision-makers must listen to the voices of children and young people, as well as those with children's issues at their heart, in global, European, regional, and national policy dialogues, take their views into account in decision-making processes, and empower them to become forceful drivers of change.



The 2024 European Parliament elections are an opportunity to place the young generations back into the European project, which is vital for their future and the future of Europe.