

# The Global Children's Event: Committing to a future fit for every child



## Thematic overview – to kickstart conversations

The Global Children's Event is an opportunity to frame global conversations, as the world starts to recover from the Covid-19 crisis and we are midway through the SDGs. UNICEF believes children must be central to these efforts given they are likely to endure the long and lasting effects of in action.

The 3-day event will be structured around 3 worlds that envelop children's lives, the world at large, the world around the child and the world of the child. Key challenges UNICEF wants to focus on relate to climate change, education, poverty and mental health. This thematic overview gives you a starting point for your conversations we would like to hear from you on what your agenda is, your key asks of decision-makers and your ideas to make this event a meaningful call to action.

- **The World at Large:** Global issues such as climate and conflict that affect the lives and future of all people.
- **The World around the Child:** Local essential services for children such as education, healthcare, and social supports
- **The World of the Child:** Issues that can affect children's daily lives, like violence and mental health.



**The World at Large:** Global issues that affect the lives and future of all people.

### **What is on the agenda?**

#### **Climate Change**

The global climate crisis is a child rights crisis. It poses a major threat to children's survival, health, education, development, and future potential. This is especially true for the most vulnerable children, who overwhelmingly live in areas that are more vulnerable to climate shocks.

Even under the most optimistic forecasts, the repercussions of climate change will worsen in the near term, with extreme weather events such as hurricanes, droughts and floods destroying the clinics and schools that children rely on for their health and development. These weather events also cause contamination in water and sanitation facilities – leading to diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea, the latter of which is still a top killer of children worldwide.

In recent years, we have seen children and young people unite in a call for action. However, many governments, businesses and other institutions have not listened to or responded to these demands adequately. The COP16 Accord calls for public and private sector donors to supply \$100 billion per year to developing countries to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement – a target that has yet to be met. Additional investment will be required at the national, corporate, and individual levels to truly realize the fairer, greener future envisioned by the Global Goals.

#### **Key Facts**

- The world has less than 10 years to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.
- Already, the number of climate-related disasters has increased by over 30% since the 1990s.
- 1.3 billion people, including 450 million children, live in areas of high or extremely high water-vulnerability, partly as a result of climate change.
- 90% of the health impacts of climate change are expected to be borne by children under age 5.

### **What is on our agenda**

Work with and for children to tackle environmental degradation and climate change, so they have access to clean water, clean air, and a safe and sustainable environment.

### What we are asking for....

- **Global investment** of \$100 billion per year as outlined in the COP16 Accord and \$250 million for UNICEF to realize its climate programming for children over five years.
- Declaring that **climate change is a child rights crisis** and signing up to, implementing and championing the Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action
- Governments to **ensure policies and practices are protective of the natural environment**, including:
  - ✓ sparing no expense to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels
  - ✓ promoting water efficiency, and
  - ✓ scaling up renewable energy at the water and sanitation facilities, clinics and schools upon which children depend.
- Children and young people to be empowered to contribute to and benefit from the transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient economies through **education programmes, skills training and career opportunities**
- Youth advocates to be given the **tools and platforms to be agents of change**
- Emergency response and disaster risk reduction efforts are supported.

### *What is on your agenda?*

### *What are you asking for?*

### Session Ideas

#### Plenary & Spotlight Sessions

- **Reflecting on COP26:** Young people weigh in on the outcomes of COP and what remains to be done.
- **The right to participate / climate education** How can young people be supported to advocate even more effectively and to take part in and benefit from the transition to a green economy? How can school not just a place of learning but a training ground for informed, active citizens? What do adults need to learn on climate?
- **What value do we place on children's future?** Discussion re: how to calculate the present value of climate action through the lens of child rights & wellbeing;
- **The overlap between climate and mental health**

#### Working Sessions

- Developing / aligning with partners on advocacy asks for COP27
- Devising youth led accountability mechanisms

### *What are your session ideas?*



**World around the Child:** Local essential services for children such as education, healthcare, and social supports.

### What is on the agenda

#### Learning Crisis<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has sharpened the world's focus on education and heightened awareness of the inequities in access to quality learning, including gender disparities in education and the digital divide. Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been closed for almost a full year. With every day that goes by, these children will fall further behind and the most vulnerable will pay the heaviest price.

At the same time, it has also generated unique momentum for change and shown that we have the tools we need to craft a modern education that builds the skills children and adolescents need – including in literacy and numeracy, and transferable, digital, entrepreneurial, and job-specific skills.

With the stakes so high, the world should not spare any effort to keep the schools open or prioritize them in reopening plans. Children cannot afford another year of school closures; especially the poorest and most marginalized ones.

#### Key Facts

- 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple text by the end of primary school age. In low-income countries, the learning crisis is even more acute, with the 'learning poverty' rate reaching 90 per cent. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, 191 countries have implemented countrywide school closures, affecting 1.6 billion learners worldwide.
- 825 million school aged children will not be on track to acquire basic secondary-level skills by 2030<sup>5</sup> and up to one-third of school children missed out and learning losses mounted<sup>6</sup>. For

example, the learning loss in Sub-Saharan Africa could accumulate to 2.8 years of long term lost learning.

- While more children and young people than ever before are enrolled in school, 250 million remained out of school even before COVID-19, thus many of the most marginalized are completely excluded from any opportunity to learn at all.
- A recent UNICEF report showed that more than two-thirds of the world's school-age children –or 1.3 billion children aged 3 to 17 years –do not have internet connection in their homes.
- Three hundred million fewer women than men use mobile-based internet, representing a gender gap of 20%. This gender digital divide is expected to have worsened because of COVID-19; while adolescents with disabilities face the greatest barrier to any form of distance education.

## What is on our agenda

Drive a global advocacy effort to tackle the learning crisis, prioritizing the most vulnerable and marginalized children, including through improved access to remote and digital learning.

## What we are asking for....

- **Schools to reopen** with the development and well-being of every student nurtured, with comprehensive services including remedial learning, health & nutrition, mental health and protection measures.
- **Improve access to quality education and learning outcomes**, monitor and mitigate students' learning losses and recognize the need to provide teachers with the training and support they need to transition to new modalities of instruction.
- **Adequate education financing** to build inclusive and responsive education systems that are resilient in the face of future disruptions.
- Governments to address and urgently **invest in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** for every child.
- Expanded **access to digital learning solutions** (including content and devices and measurement) to ensure learning for the hardest to reach children and young people.
- **Integration of mental health and vital health support programmes in schools** and learning centers.
- **Engagement with young people as advocates**, to help drive this historic change at scale, and reach marginalized children.

## *What is on your agenda?*

## *What are you asking for?*

## Session Ideas

**We cannot recover without addressing the crisis of care and inequality**

We've lost 25 years in 12 months. Can we catch up?

## *What are your session ideas?*



**The World of the Child:** Issues that can affect children’s daily lives, like violence and mental health.

### **What is on the agenda**

#### **Mental Health**

Mental health is a global issue, yet it remains stigmatized and underfunded in almost every country, rich or poor. Poor mental health in childhood and adolescence prevents children from fulfilling their rights and reaching their true potential.

All children and adolescents, and their parents and caregivers, are at risk of poor mental health outcomes. However, risks are particularly acute for the most vulnerable, for example, those who live in humanitarian emergencies and low resource settings, those facing violence, neglect, and abuse in the home, or those living with disabilities. In different contexts, race and gender can also play a role in determining mental health outcomes.

The absence of parental attachment and nurturing caregiving in early childhood is a major driver of mental health problems that become manifest in adolescence. This is compounded by isolation and the absence of supportive relationships in the school and community. Regular exposure to adverse experiences in childhood (from birth to age 18) can cause an ongoing stress response and have serious neuro-biological impacts on children’s immediate and long-term health, development, and wellbeing.

Adolescence is a time of significant psychological, physical, and social change which can also heighten the risk of mental health and psychosocial problems. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, trauma, abuse, and life stress events have the greatest effects on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing

during the developmentally sensitive phases of early life and adolescence. Such life stressors have traditionally included poor living conditions, substance use, gender-based violence, and bullying. These threats are further compounded by contemporary risks such as poor social support from parents, peers, or teachers; social media use; and cyberbullying.

COVID-19 has put the mental health and well-being of an entire generation at risk with the potential for long-term poor mental health consequences among children, young people, and their parents and caregivers across all corners of the globe.

Worldwide, the majority of those who need mental health care do not have access to good quality support and services. The magnitude of the mental health burden we face is simply not being matched by the response it demands.

### **Key Facts**

- In WHO/CDC supported studies, at least 60% of any given population have experienced one adverse childhood experience and at least 25% have experienced three or more.
- Diagnosable mental health conditions affect about one in seven, 14 percent, of children and adolescents aged 6–18. A fifth of adolescents aged 12–18 have a mental health condition. Depression alone is on track to be the leading disease burden in the next ten years.
- Suicide is claiming the lives of up to 800,000 people every year - 1 person every 40 seconds - and it's the third leading cause of death among young people aged 15 – 19.
- Half of all mental health conditions start by 14 years of age but most cases, while treatable, go undetected and untreated. It is estimated that globally between 15– 23 percent of children live with a parent who has a mental health condition and adolescent mothers are at a particularly high risk of developing mental health conditions like depression.

### **What is on our agenda**

Secure investment and action to support families and communities to bring an end to neglect, abuse and childhood traumas that drive poor mental health and life outcomes.

### **What we are asking for....**

- **Secure investment in mental health and psychosocial support services** across all sectors and community services and structures for all children, adolescents, and families, from high-income countries, low-and middle-income countries, and humanitarian settings. Services must be appropriate for and adapted to specific cultural contexts.
- Support families through **parenting programmes** to promote positive parenting and nurturing caregiving, and to **support caregiver well-being and mental health**.
- Ensure that **all children and adolescents learn and interact in safe and secure environments**, both online and off, with supportive relationships and **access to mental health services** for all who need them.
- Changing the public conversation on mental health through communication and behavior change strategies that engage service users, **tackle stigma and discrimination**, promote positive parenting practices, and **equip mental health-informed and resilient communities and societies** with respect and attention to local nuances and contexts

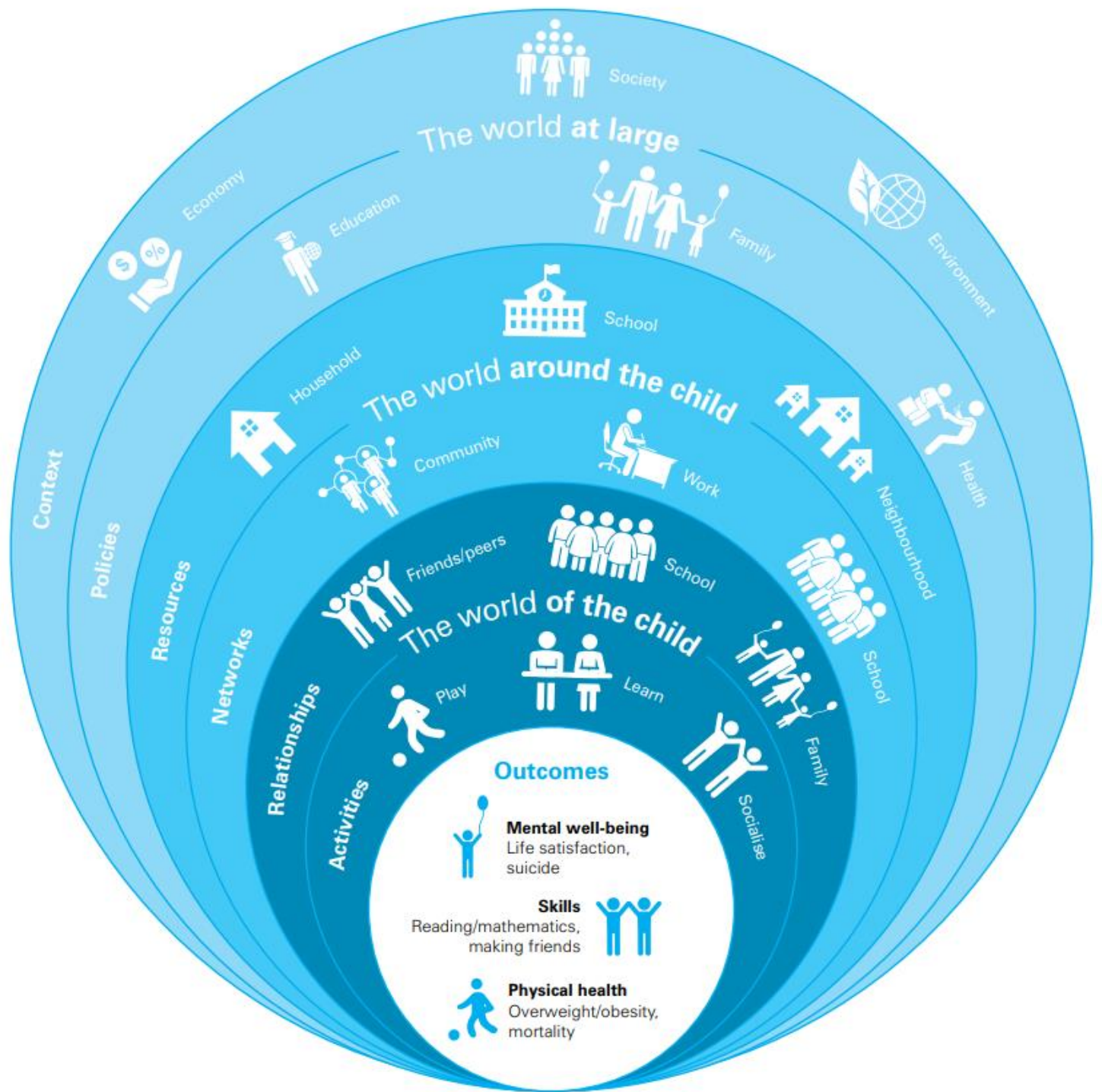
### **What is on your agenda?**

### **What are you asking for?**

### **Session Ideas**

- **Climate's impact on mental health**
- **Mental health as a family affair How do we better support parents and caretakers to raise healthy, happy children?**

### **What are your session ideas?**



<sup>i</sup> The learning crisis refers to the gap between the levels of learning that education systems are providing and what children, communities, and economies need. An estimated 53% of 10-year-olds in low-and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story (89% in sub-Saharan Africa). If current trends continue, 825 million children in low-and middle-income countries will not be on track to acquire basic secondary-level skills by 2030. The learning crisis also refers to the 260million school-age children who are not enrolled in school.