

Young Leaders' Call to Action to the UK Government

We, as youth advocates are concerned about the huge challenges faced by children and youth around the world. We ask the UK Government to be mindful of the following threats to our rights, well-being, and future:

- **Gender-based Violence and Gender-Inequality:** Violence against girls (and boys) remains a key global issue. Children experience physical, emotional, and sexual violence at home, at school, online and in the community. Child marriage, child labour, child trafficking and other forms of violence are concerns in our countries. But there are a lack of channels to report abuse or to hold abusers to account. Support for child victims is limited or non-existent; they are missing out on schooling, becoming child mothers, and are losing out on their futures.
- **Barriers to Education and Learning:** The cost-of-living crisis, as well as COVID-19, conflict, and the impacts of climate change are preventing many children in our communities from getting an education. School infrastructure and digital access is often lacking, and many families can't afford their basic needs, never mind the fees, transportation, and supplies for schooling. More children are forced to marry, work, or stay at home to care for siblings. Many children who are displaced, even those who have been welcomed in the UK, are struggling to attend school and learn.
- **Access to Healthcare and Mental Health Support:** In our communities, there are not enough resources to support with young peoples' mental and physical health. Access to healthcare, specifically sexual and reproductive health and mental health services and addiction support can be particularly difficult for children. This is made worse by the cost of healthcare, lack of child-sensitive facilities, stigma, and lack of awareness amongst children of vaccines available to them.
- **Lack of inclusion of support for children with disabilities:** Greater challenges exist for children with disabilities. Schools are not often accessible, and teachers not sufficiently trained to work with them. Community structures are seldom built to allow access and social protection is either not available or not accessible. Children with disabilities also face bullying and stigma in schools and communities.
- **Impacts of Climate Change:** We continue to see an increase in changeable weather as a result of climate change. In some countries, children are forced to leave their homes because of natural disasters. Around the world, climate change is leading to food insecurity, with children facing malnutrition and stunting at crucial stages of their development, which affects their future. Schools are destroyed or children cannot attend or concentrate, and sanitary products are not available for girls. The lack of knowledge on climate resilience or climate change education in school curriculums, and the lack of action by adults and countries most responsible, make this the first generation who will have a lower quality of life than their parents.

We believe that the UK Government, Members of Parliament, and UK decision-makers have a vital role to play in addressing these global issues. Governments must use their resources and influence to fulfil existing commitments and ensure that every child is healthy, safe, and learning. With this help, both girls and boys can ultimately enjoy a good quality of life and can feel hopeful about their futures.

Commitments are not enough; we need real concrete actions that make a difference to our lives, and the lives of children everywhere, and protect our futures. The UK Government must:

1) Empower and engage with children and young people by:

- Being accountable to children – creating a Children and Youth Advisory Council, with terms of reference that includes regular dialogue with government officials, and commitment to creating a 4-year Action Plan for Young People with this Council. Implementation of this action plan should be monitored jointly and adapted annually as needed.
- Advocating with other governments – like ours - to ensure laws, policies, and their implementation positively impacts children. The UK can be a powerful voice for children around the world; we want to see 'Global Britain as a Force for Good' in action.
- Engaging and funding girl-youth-led campaigns and groups, ensuring that the most marginalised children, including children with disabilities and ethnic minority children are fully supported.

2) Champion gender equality and an end to gender-based violence (specifically for girls, and boys) by:

- Putting girls (and boys) at the heart of gender equality policy, programming & diplomacy – don't wait until we are adults.
- Prioritising girls (and boys) in gender-based violence programme funding. This must include maintaining or increasing funding to address child marriage, female genital mutilation, child labour and child sexual abuse as well as requiring a girl-lens to broader gender equality programme funding decisions.

3) Fulfil global education commitments by:

- Provide social protection funding as part of education programming and advocate for adequate social protection mechanisms in all countries to ensure every family can afford to send their children to school.
- Embed support for pregnant girls and teenage mothers into your global education priorities so that social workers are prepared and education systems welcome and are suitable to meet their needs.
- Improving access for children with disabilities and/or mental health issues, including funding the training of teachers to understand and ensure their equal participation in learning.
- Use your position in the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children and the Global Partnership for Education to promote a campaign with social media influencers to ensure schools and communities are violence-free spaces for children.

4) Improve children's physical and mental health by:

- Funding and advocating for strengthening health systems and ensuring children have access to health services.
- Prioritising investment in mental health programming in both development and humanitarian contexts, including building numbers and capacity of psychologists to support children's mental health.
- Funding and advocating for awareness raising programmes on child and youth mental health for parents and teachers, challenging stigma, and gender stereotypes around mental health.
- Embed a child-lens to sexual and reproductive health programming and advocacy, ensuring that care and vaccines are free, available, and accessible to all.

5) Prioritise conflict-affected and displaced children, wherever they may be by:

- Championing education on climate change in schools as part of your climate change leadership following COP26.
- Delivering on the climate financing commitments set out at COP15 and ratified in the Paris Agreement, and subsequent COP conferences – we should not pay for your lack of action.
- Lead by example and advocate with other governments for increased recycling, clean air, water, soil, and streets.

6) Protect children's future and honour existing climate commitments by:

- Putting children at the heart of your humanitarian funding and conflict diplomacy – always ask 'where do the children fit in this?' when making decisions.
- Showing leadership in ensuring access to education and mental health support for children who have been displaced in their own country, are on the move, or have settled in another country – including those who have come to the UK. We must be able to have education in our own language, feel secure in their status, and be supported to socialise and integrate into our new surroundings.
- Counter the narrative that child refugees are a burden.

DO NOT SPEAK AND ACT FOR US, BUT PARTNER WITH US.

For more information

This Call to Action was developed by Youth Advocates Dola (Bangladesh), Mara (Romania), Alex (Romania), Elie (Lebanon), Lidia (Kenya), Kate (UK), Mariana (Ukraine, now living in UK) and Varvara (Ukraine, now living in UK) with support from World Vision UK in advance of our 'Changemakers' campaign week in London, 9th-12th May 2023. For further information, please contact Erica Hall, Policy Manager, World Vision UK (erica.hall@worldvision.org.uk) or Abby Jones, Policy & Campaigns Adviser, World Vision UK (abigail.jones@worldvision.org.uk).