

**A JOINT PROPOSAL FOR
A WHITE HOUSE-LED INITIATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH GLOBALLY**



A White House-led Initiative for Children & Youth Globally Joint Proposal

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Date: May 2024

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Submitted by:



** The organizations listed above are committed to improving conditions for young people everywhere. They agree on the urgent need for children and youth to be a higher priority in US government policy, programming, and funding. Their support does not necessarily mean that they advocate for every recommendation, but it does mean that they call for a White House-led Whole Child, Whole of Life, and whole-of-government initiative to support young people and ensure a brighter future for all of us. Most recommendations benefit young people both internationally and domestically, although the information centers on improving US foreign assistance. The proposal complements other recommendations by US-focused children's rights advocacy organizations and networks. This is a living list with more groups joining.**

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“Our world is at an inflection point...How we respond to tremendous challenges and the unprecedented opportunities we face today will determine the direction of our world and impact the security and prosperity of the American people for generations to come.”¹

I. Executive Summary

Investing in children is a win-win proposition. This memorandum proposes a White House-led initiative to address the urgent needs of children and youth² (together referred to as “young people”) everywhere. The United States government, alongside other leaders around the world, provides important investments and initiatives to address the needs of our young people. However, significant gaps exist to provide a more impactful approach that harnesses the coordinated work across US agencies, combines US assistance and diplomatic efforts, and implements a Whole Child, Whole of Life, and whole-of-government approach.

Although the content of this memorandum focuses on conditions and recommendations to improve US support for children internationally, the whole-of-government approach would also have a positive effect on children and youth in the United States. This memorandum builds on existing US government activities to support young people, applies learning from prior White House-led initiatives, and reflects the expertise of US advocates and lived-experience experts from around the world. The result is a proposal to leverage the full power of the US government for a transformative impact on children and youth everywhere.

Pivotal Moment

US leadership that prioritizes children and youth is highly beneficial and acutely necessary now to ensure a better and more secure future for all of us. The recent confluence of global crises has had a devastating impact on children and youth and caused critical setbacks in development goals. UNICEF has warned of a lost generation with sobering consequences for future generations.³

Global crises have had a disproportionate impact on children and youth⁴; and those from marginalized and underserved communities⁵ are now at even higher risk of harm due to displacement, discrimination, and exclusion. In December 2021, UNICEF warned that the COVID-19 pandemic was “rolling back virtually every measure of progress for children.”⁶ Global crises have disrupted progress that was achieved over decades to improve equality, education, violence prevention, participatory governance, nutrition, health, and other basic protections that advance human rights and lead to more productive and

¹ Biden, Jr., Joseph R., National Security Strategy. October 2022.

² The age range for “children” is universally understood to extend to until (under) age 18. The age range for youth varies; USAID defines youth as ages 10-29, the United Nations as ages 15-24, and some countries count youth up to age 35. Children include infancy, early childhood, adolescence, and young youth. Youth include older children, adolescents, and teenagers. The reality is that the ages of children and youth often overlap, requiring a lens that acknowledges this continuum and that recognizes these age groups as critical stages for a person’s healthy development. This paper addresses the conditions and needs of children and youth distinctively and at times together as (“young people”).

³ UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/unicef-calls-averting-lost-generation-covid-19-threatens-cause-irreversible-harm#:~:text=The%20future%20of%20an%20entire,infections%20reported%20by%20these%20countries>. Accessed October 2023.

⁴ “New WHO–HBSC data shed light on COVID-19 pandemic’s effects on children and adolescents” World Health Organization. 28 June 2023. <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/28-06-2023-new-who-hbhc-data-shed-light-on-covid-19-pandemic-s-effects-on-children-and-adolescents>.

⁵ Marginalized and/or underrepresented groups - groups that are disproportionately excluded from opportunities and systems (e.g., employment, political representation, education, basic services), often due to structural and societal obstacles and historical marginalization. Such groups may include, but are certainly not limited to, women; youth; children in adversity and their families; older persons; persons with disabilities; LGBTQI+3 people; displaced persons; migrants; Indigenous Peoples and communities; non-dominant religious, racial, and ethnic groups; people of castes traditionally considered lower; people of lower socioeconomic status; and people with unmet mental health needs. “Nothing Without Us: USAID Disability Policy” USAID 2023.

⁶ COVID-19 ‘biggest global crisis for children in our 75-year history’ – UNICEF. UNICEF. 11 December 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/turkiye/en/press-releases/covid-19-biggest-global-crisis-children-our-75-year-history-unicef>.

stable societies.⁷ The implications are shocking, since more than half of the world's population is under the age of 30 today including over 2.4 billion young people who comprise the largest youth population in history.⁸ Globally, 90% of the world's young people live in the Global South.⁹

Nevertheless, children and youth do and will play a major role in resolving critical global crises and promoting healthier, more stable, and inclusive societies. As the US government labors to achieve crucial foreign policy goals, the reality is that children and youth in every region are among the most effective champions, partners, and protagonists for promoting a better world. Whether advocating for democratic governance, mitigating conflicts and strengthening peace and security, tackling climate change, or calling for equity and justice, young people around the globe have stood steadfast to demand change, challenge decision-makers, and insist on more accountable and just governance. Despite the essential role of young people, governments everywhere often dismiss the perspectives of these change agents.

We are confident that by supporting and improving outcomes for young people everywhere, the US will build the foundation for a better future globally, thus enhancing efforts to achieve US national and security goals. The US National Security Strategy (NSS) affirms the President's commitment to "set our world firmly on a path toward a brighter and more hopeful tomorrow."¹⁰ Through the NSS and other US global initiatives, the US government has prioritized tackling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, armed conflicts, and the challenges resulting from historic, deep-rooted disparities that fuel injustice, poverty, and discrimination. Despite the acute consequences of these crises on children and youth and the substantial role of children and youth in our future, young people worldwide are frequently an afterthought in US foreign policy and assistance.

Effectual Approach

This proposal provides a plan for the President to launch a whole-of-government priority to make children and youth a greater and more consistent component of US policy, programming, and funding. Although the US government provides leadership globally on many issues relating to children, the efforts across US agencies often lack cohesion, authority, and transparency.

US policies, programs, and funding related to global children and youth issues are complex and conducted across disparate agencies with distinct workstreams. US government-funded programs that impact children and youth internationally are managed across 26-30 offices.¹¹ There is currently no single person, office, or plan to coordinate across all of these efforts; nor are there clearly identified budget accounts to provide transparent and readily available reporting on progress across life stages and sectoral issues.¹² The return on investment is high for foreign assistance that directly and indirectly benefits children.^{13 14} The US government would benefit from more consistent, coordinated, and fully

⁷ "Multiple crises halt progress as 9 out of 10 countries fall backwards in human development, UNDP report warns", UN Development Program. 8 September 2022, <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/multiple-crises-halt-progress-9-out-10-countries-fall-backwards-human-development-undp-report-warns>.

⁸ "Youth Impact" USAID, <https://www.usaid.gov/youthimpact>, Accessed November 2023

⁹ "Thematic Fact Sheet: Youth and Empowerment" UNESCO, January 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/youth-and-empowerment#:~:text=Close%20to%2090%20per%20cent,reach%20830%20million%20by%202050>.

¹⁰ "National Security Strategy" The White House, October 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

¹¹ Children's Budget 2023, First Focus on Children.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Recently, World Vision and Ernst & Young Australia collaborated to assess the return on investment for global funding for children. This groundbreaking report will officially be released in June 2024 and is expected to show new numbers and a high return when foreign assistance investments are prioritized on the needs of children, directly and indirectly.

integrated mechanisms with sufficient authority to prompt strategic approaches, foster aligned actions, and improve budget allocation and monitoring for children and youth.

Before preparing this proposal, advocates reviewed the initiatives of past US Presidents.¹⁵ They found that strong White House support and instructions were essential to achieving consistent government-wide prioritization, implementation, and integration. This proposal charts a similar approach to make children and youth a central, strategic priority. The proposal provides mechanisms to integrate the priority across US agencies, ensure senior-level attention with effectual authority at each agency, provide clear instructions for integrating and tracking funds, promote regular consultations with affected communities, and increase efficiencies in US policies, programs, and funding. The whole-of-government approach would ensure multiple agencies, bureaus, and offices engage in a coordinated strategy with clearly defined and shared metrics for success to improve the well-being of children in multiple domains.

Drawing on research and learnings, the recommendations propose a Whole Child¹⁶ approach. This approach facilitates holistic consideration of children's intersecting needs, concurrent risks and vulnerabilities, and best interests through their life ages and developmental stages. In essence, a Whole Child approach considers the child's perspective and their multi- and cross-sectoral needs—e.g., education, violence prevention, family care, health, and nutrition—to experience healthy development and contribute actively to their society. The proposal also recommends a Whole of Life approach, which recognizes that needs change throughout the different stages of development and requires greater coordination across the US government efforts that address maternal health, children, and youth, for example. With this combined lens, young people are viewed as individuals who have intersecting needs and require mutually reinforcing support.

The proposal reflects input from persons with lived experience, advocates, researchers, donors, policymakers, and others. The recommendations emphasize that special attention is necessary for the most marginalized and/or underrepresented groups that are often at risk of and/or exposed to severe harm. The approach also takes into account the critical role of families, schools, and communities in helping young people reach their full potential and the importance of supporting their capacity so that all young people can integrate and contribute fully to their society.

In addition to specific recommendations, this memorandum provides annexes. Annex One summarizes the consequential role of children in achieving major US priorities. Annex Two briefly describes the impact of global crises on children and the implications for our future. Annex Three acknowledges individuals who contributed directly to different parts of this proposal.

We are at a crossroads. How the US government responds at this pivotal time could be transformational for future generations. The magnitude of the crises affecting young people globally requires an equally impressive response. **We urge you now to launch a major White House-led initiative to prioritize the critical needs of children and youth, the most fundamental protagonists for a brighter future.**

¹⁵ Advocates reviewed several previous presidential priorities to assess what did and did not work well, including initiatives such as the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Feed the Future, the Genocide Prevention Task Force, the Atrocity Prevention Board, White House Council on Women, Office of Global Women's Issues at the Department of State and the Senior Coordinator at USAID, US Council on International Religious Freedom, the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. They also reviewed many whole-of-government strategies and blueprints including the Genocide Prevention Task Force Blueprint for US Policymakers, US Government Strategy on International Basic Education, US Action Plan on Children in Adversity, US Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, US Strategy on Women, Peace and Security, the USAID Youth in Development Policy, the USAID Disability Policy, and more.

¹⁶ In addition, to the description in this paragraph, several groups collaborated to create a short video with a thumbnail description of Whole Child: <https://vimeo.com/873888044/6bbb401d7e>.

II. Opportunity and Urgency for a White House-led Initiative

There are myriad benefits to launching a White House-led initiative now that prioritizes and invests in children and youth everywhere.

A. Vital Agents of Change

Advancing the well-being of children is critical to building a foundation for healthy, stable, peaceful societies. The Biden Administration's priority areas of democracy, climate change, pandemic recovery, and equity and inclusion all impact—and are deeply impacted by—young people. Ensuring the well-being of children and youth and engaging young people as partners for positive change will strengthen US efforts in its priority areas, improve the sustainability and effectiveness of US investments, and chart a path for a better future.

Children under age 18 make up almost one-third of the world's population and children and youth together make up almost half the population in some countries.¹⁷ Furthermore, children made up more than 41 percent of the world's refugees in 2022.¹⁸

There is ample evidence demonstrating the critical role of young people in advancing democracy and good governance, strengthening conflict mitigation and sustainable peace and security, preparing climate change response, and expanding equity and inclusion.¹⁹ Children and youth are deeply affected by these priorities and are leading change agents for positive reforms. Young people such as Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, and Nadia Murad have achieved global recognition and have profoundly influenced political discourse around the world. On every continent, children and youth have led, mobilized, and inspired major movements to demand political reforms and expand rights, equality, and justice.

B. Compounded Crises

The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is difficult to overestimate. Young people suffered disproportionately and the implications for the future are alarming.²⁰ The pandemic caused pervasive learning loss, isolation, food insecurity, and disruption of health services.²¹ Adolescent girls have been especially at risk of a distressing increase in sexual and gender-based violence²² and disruption in education.²³ Overall, an estimated 10.5 million children lost a parent or caregiver²⁴ causing a sharp rise in

¹⁷ "Because Children Are Everyone's Business" The United Nations Global Compact, <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social/childrens-rights>.

¹⁸ "Child displacement," UNICEF data hub, last updated June 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>.

¹⁹ Annex One provides more details about how children and youth are affected by and are leading change agents for these global priorities.

²⁰ "Multiple crises halt progress as 9 out of 10 countries fall backwards in human development, UNDP report warns", UN Development Program. 8 September 2022, <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/multiple-crises-halt-progress-9-out-10-countries-fall-backwards-human-development-undp-report-warns>.

²¹ UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/unicef-calls-averting-lost-generation-covid-19-threatens-cause-irreversible-harm#:~:text=The%20future%20of%20an%20entire,infections%20reported%20by%20these%20countries>.

²² "Disturbing rise in teenage pregnancy, child marriage, gender-based violence and HIV infection in adolescent girls in East and Southern Africa – we need to act collectively and with urgency." UN Population Fund (UNFPA). 11 October 2022, <https://southsudan.unfpa.org/en/news/disturbing-rise-teenage-pregnancy-child-marriage-gender-based-violence%C2%A0-and-hiv-infection>.

²³ "Leaving no girl behind in education" UN Women. 11 October 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/10/leaving-no-girl-behind-in-education>.

²⁴ Hillis S, N'konzi JN, Msemburi W, et al. Orphanhood and Caregiver Loss Among Children Based on New Global Excess COVID-19 Death Estimates. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2022;176(11):1145–1148. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3157.

orphanhood; these children and youth face elevated risk of poverty, abuse, mental health challenges, reduced access to education, delayed development, and institutionalization.²⁵

Further intensifying the severity of the circumstances are the impacts of violent conflicts and climate displacement. The world is currently experiencing more violent conflicts in recent history²⁶: “Six out of seven people worldwide are plagued by feelings of insecurity; the world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since the Second World War and 2 billion people—a quarter of humanity—live in places affected by such conflict.”²⁷ The frequency and severity of extreme weather events also appear to be increasing, causing further mass displacement, loss of livelihood, and heightened insecurity.²⁸

C. Impact of Persistent and Severe Trauma

The impact trauma has on the health and well-being of children and youth can last a lifetime. Exposure to violence in early childhood can alter biological development, impair brain architecture, and even influence DNA.²⁹ Young people who have been exposed to violence are at higher risk for depression and deficiencies in empathy.³⁰ These conditions can increase vulnerability for perpetrating violence and recruitment into extremist groups and organized violence, generating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence; but some interventions can interrupt and reverse these outcomes.³¹ The longer children experience persistent and extreme stress—severe poverty, abuse, neglect, exposure to violence—the greater their risk of developmental delays and other problems.³² Early intervention and prevention are the least costly and most impactful ways to turn the tide on the long-term impacts of toxic stress.³³

D. Economic Implications

Clearly, global crises have had a disproportionate impact on children and youth with dire consequences for our future. The cost to the global economy may total \$21 trillion in lost lifetime earnings of today’s student generation.³⁴

Learning loss is just one form of hardship with vast economic implications for the future. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures affected 1.6 billion learners. In addition, child labor rates rose to 160 million, the first increase the world has seen in two decades.³⁵ This includes a significant uptick in

²⁵ “Global Orphanhood Associated with Covid-19,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/covid-19/orphanhood/index.html>.

²⁶ “With Highest Number of Violent Conflicts Since Second World War, United Nations Must Rethink Efforts to Achieve, Sustain Peace, Speakers Tell Security Council” United Nations.” Meeting Coverage and Press Release, UN Security Council. January 2023.

²⁷ Mohammed, Amina J. Deputy Secretary-General United Nations.

²⁸ Alvey, Jim, “As the Frequency and Severity of Natural Disasters Increases, So Too Must the Thoughtfulness of Donations” Blog post. Good360.

²⁹ Danese, Andrea and McEwen, Bruce S., “Adverse Childhood Experiences, Allostasis, Allostatic Load, and Age-Related Disease,” *Physiological Behavior* 106, no. 1 (2012): 29–39. And *Am J. Psychiatry*. 2013 Oct. 1; 170(10): 1114-1133. Doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2013.12070957. Martin H. Teicher and Jacqueline A. Samson “Childhood maltreatment and psychopathology: A case for ecophenotypic variants as clinically and neurobiologically distinct subtypes” U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institute of Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3928064/>.

³⁰ Mercy, Jim, “CDC Measures Violence against Children, Sparks Action,” CDC Foundation blog post, November 25, 2013.

³¹ Milani, Leila R., “Youth, Trauma & Radicalization.” Arriaga, M. A. Linking Security of Women & Security of States, *Futures Without Violence*, May 2017.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “70% of 10-Year-Olds now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text,” World Bank, June 23, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/23/70-of-10-year-olds-now-in-learning-poverty-unable-to-read-and-understand-a-simple-text>.

³⁵ “UN experts urge action to address alarming increase of child labour in agriculture sector” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, May 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/05/un-experts-urge-action-address->

children engaged in hazardous work between the ages of 5 to 11 years old, who are at risk for physical and mental harm.³⁶ Girls were especially affected by school closures during the pandemic and many were unable to resume their studies later. In many countries, girls' future earnings "are tied to the men in their lives from fathers and brothers to husbands and sons."³⁷ If every girl worldwide received 12 years of quality education, then the lifetime earnings for women could increase by US \$15 trillion. In addition, each additional school year can increase a woman's earnings by 10% to 20% toward her future annual income, and adult girls are more likely to invest a far larger percentage of their income back into their family.³⁸

Compounding the future implications of learning loss, are other acute conditions young people now face, including the effects of multi-dimensional poverty, increased exposure to violence, disruption of health services, mass displacement, and rise in orphanhood due to loss of caregivers. The trauma, hardships, and insecurity affecting children and youth have predictable consequences for our future.

Deliberate investments are critical now to support children and youth at levels that are commensurate with the scope of the problem.

E. Return on Investment

Research shows that investments in children are highly lucrative and result in a significant return for every dollar spent to improve the lives of children and safeguard their well-being around the world.^{39 40}

- Every \$1 invested in international education delivers as much as \$15 in economic returns.⁴¹
- Every \$1 invested to scale up early childhood development programs results in as much as \$68 in improved health, social, and economic outcomes.⁴²
- Every \$1 invested to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria delivers \$31 in health gains and economic returns.⁴³
- Every \$1 invested to support youth-led peacebuilding programs yields a \$5-\$10 return on investment.⁴⁴
- Every \$1 invested in nutrition results in up to \$35 in economic returns.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, current investments in children and youth are disproportionately low in relation to both the high yield on investments and the severe risks of inaction. While only 1.4 percent of the proposed federal budget for Fiscal Year 2024 includes is for foreign assistance funding, just 0.10 percent of that 1.4

alarming-increase-child-labour-agriculture#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20the%20number%20of,are%20engaged%20in%20hazardous%20work.

³⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/child-labour-rises-160-million-first-increase-two-decades>.

³⁷ "Giving girls a chance," Global Campaign for Education-US, <https://www.gce-us.org/girls-education/#:~:text=One%20additional%20school%20year%20can,future%20and%20their%20country%27s%20future>.

³⁸ "Giving girls a chance," Global Campaign for Education-US, <https://www.gce-us.org/girls-education/#:~:text=One%20additional%20school%20year%20can,future%20and%20their%20country%27s%20future>.

³⁹ The figures in this segment were compiled by First Focus on Children based on recent data.

⁴⁰ Recently, World Vision and Ernst & Young Australia collaborated to assess the return on investment for global funding for children. This groundbreaking report will officially be released in June 2024 and is expected to show new numbers and a high return when foreign assistance investments are prioritized on the needs of children, directly and indirectly.

⁴¹ "Interning Basic Education Funding Needs Fiscal Year 2022," GCE-US, <https://www.gce-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/International-Basic-Education-Letter-FY22.pdf>.

⁴² García, et al., "The Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program," 2016.

⁴³ Reid, Michael, and Eric Goosby. "Securing Global Fund Replenishment to Avoid Another Cassandra Moment." *The Lancet Global Health* 10, no. 11 (2022). [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x\(22\)00392-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x(22)00392-8).

⁴⁴ Kumar, S., Olsen, S., Mallett, A., Prelis, S. (2023). Building Evidence for Peacebuilding Investments: A Snapshot of Youth-Led and Youth-Supporting Peacebuilding Programs in Kenya Yields Five to Ten-Fold Social Returns on Investment (SROI). (USAID). https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZZ8J.pdf.

⁴⁵ "Nutrition: Global Health." U.S. Agency for International Development, February 28, 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/global-health/health-areas/nutrition>.

percent, benefits children globally. That's 0.0014 percent of the federal budget.⁴⁶ Children who thrive, especially in their early years⁴⁷, are more likely to become productive citizens and contribute to a prosperous economy and participatory democracy.⁴⁸ Caring for children is caring for our world. There is growing evidence showing that when children thrive, economies grow, political participation increases, and communities flourish.

To make the most of US taxpayer dollars and strategic investments and to make the world a better place, there must be significant and holistic investments in children and youth. Furthermore, US leadership often paves the way for other donor governments, foundations, and the private sector to engage and provide funding. Either we invest in their critical, interconnected needs now or we continue to backslide in areas that affect our future well-being and safety.

III. Learnings and Recommendations

A. US Priorities and Relevant Initiatives

As noted above, US leadership is urgently needed to respond to the compounding crises affecting young people and ensure a better future for generations to come. The recommendations proposed in this memorandum reflect learnings from previous presidential priorities that have had wide reach and lasting effects. The recommendations are based on experience and understanding of existing structures and mechanisms, perceptions of current gaps, and exploration of opportunities for increased impact⁴⁹.

In recent decades, there are several notable examples of White House-led initiatives that have had a long-lasting, positive impact and that have elevated US efforts to improve conditions for marginalized populations and global human rights. Notable examples (listed chronologically) include:

- President Bill Clinton's actions to elevate women's issues including new structures, an Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues with a strong mandate and clear, senior-level authority, and White House convenings to create the first US Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence Globally.
- President George W. Bush's initiative to curtail the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and the launch of The US President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).
- President Barack Obama's efforts to combat modern-day slavery in the United States around the world by convening the first White House Forum to Combat Human Trafficking and receiving a report and recommendations from the President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.
- President Donald Trump's focus to build on the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act and the Women, Peace, and Security Act.

⁴⁶ "Children's Budget 2023", First Focus on Children, <https://firstfocus.org/resources/report/childrens-budget-2023>.

⁴⁷ Global Child Thrive Act, subtitle I of title XII of division A of Public Law 116-283.

⁴⁸ World Vision with Ernst and Young Australia recently concluded a new analysis to assess the return on investment of foreign assistance focused on children. This research is expected to show a high return when foreign assistance investments are prioritized on the needs of children.

⁴⁹ Advocates reviewed several previous presidential priorities to assess what did and did not work well, including initiatives such as the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Feed the Future, the Genocide Prevention Task Force, the Atrocity Prevention Board, White House Council on Women, Office of Global Women's Issues at the Department of State and the Senior Coordinator at USAID, US Council on International Religious Freedom, the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. They also reviewed many whole-of-government strategies and blueprints including the Genocide Prevention Task Force Blueprint for US Policymakers, US Government Strategy on International Basic Education, US Action Plan on Children in Adversity, US Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, US Strategy on Women, Peace and Security, the USAID Youth in Development Policy, the USAID Disability Policy, and more.

- Your recently established White House Gender Policy Council to coordinate government-wide efforts to tackle inequality, discrimination, and violence based on gender and other identity characteristics.

In addition to exploring learnings from the successful priorities of previous presidents, the proposals in this memorandum examined current structures and gaps to design recommendations that would elevate and improve US actions for children and youth.

With leadership, collaboration, and support from the White House, existing disparate strategies promoting the well-being of children and youth internationally could be coordinated and given greater authority for greater reach and effect, different programs could coalesce under a common theme to increase awareness and outcomes, and distinct funding streams could be better tracked to improve coordination, facilitate complementary allocation, and improve efficiencies.

While there are a variety of excellent initiatives that could have a greater impact, some lack sufficient authority to influence actions across the US government and others often operate in siloes. Among the various US strategies, policies, and surveys, a few key examples include: the US Strategy Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity, the Youth in Development Policy, and Safe From the Start ReVisioned, led by USAID, as well as initiatives through the Powered by the People (PxP) Initiative⁵⁰ and YouthPower2⁵¹; the US Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, led by the Department of State; the Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys, led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at the Department of Health and Human Services; various initiatives of the Cyber Crime Center's (C3's) Child Exploitation Investigations Unit, led by the Department of Homeland Security; the National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, and the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, both coordinated by the White House.

Existing frameworks also emanate from a variety of authorizing frameworks, including the Executive Order to tackle Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (2021 EO 14008), the Presidential Memorandum on the Coordination of Policies and Programs to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls Globally (January 30, 2013)⁵², the Executive Order on the Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council (March 8, 2021)⁵³, the Global Child Thrive Act of 2000 (Public Law No: 116-283), the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (Public Law No: 106-386) (and its subsequent reauthorization), the Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks (1997 EO 13045), and the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act of 2005 (Public Law No: 109-95). A White House-led, whole-of-government approach would help bring cohesion to these initiatives and facilitate engagement across multiple agencies, bureaus, and offices to coordinate strategy with clearly defined and shared metrics for success to improve the well-being of children and youth in multiple domains.

⁵⁰ Powered by the People (PxP) initiative, a partnership by USAID and Humanity United, launched October 16, 2023. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/oct-16-2023-usaid-announces-45-million-support-efforts-advancing-human-rights-social-justice-democracy-and-inclusive-development#:~:text=PxP%20provides%20flexible%20and%20accessible,inclusive%20development%20around%20the%20world>.

⁵¹ YouthPower2, supported by USAID. <https://www.youthpower.org/>.

⁵² Presidential Memorandum on the Coordination of Policies and Programs to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls Globally (January 30, 2013). <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/30/presidential-memorandum-coordination-policies-and-programs-promote-gende>.

⁵³ Executive Order on the Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council (March 8, 2021)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/03/08/executive-order-on-establishment-of-the-white-house-gender-policy-council/>.

Within the US government's foreign policy apparatus, there are several key offices and positions with differing levels of authority and challenges to influence agency-wide policy, programmatic, and funding decisions. Many of these positions could be elevated to form part of an office that has direct reporting to the Secretary or Administrator with deputies focused on children and on youth. Currently, lead officials often lack sufficient authority for broad impact and funding streams are generally difficult to track. Further discussion of these positions appears below in the recommendations section. A presidential initiative that improves cross-agency coordination, elevates positions and grants greater authority, and systematically lifts children and youth in policy, programming, and funding decisions would go a long way to help meet our national security goals and global objectives.

A holistic approach is essential, not only in the US government's structures but also in its intellectual framing of the issues. To increase impact and efficacy, it is incumbent to adopt a more comprehensive view of young peoples' intersecting needs, concurrent risks, and changing vulnerabilities. We strongly support a Whole Child approach, which seeks to center the child's perspective and address their multi- and cross-sectoral needs—e.g., education, violence prevention, family care, health, and nutrition—so that they can experience healthy development and contribute actively to their society. In addition, we support a Whole of Life approach that acknowledges the evolving yet intertwined needs of young people as they move through different developmental stages and chronological ages. By applying these two lenses, children and youth are understood as individuals with intersecting needs that require mutually reinforcing support and strategies.

As a general practice, the role and impact of young people should be considered consistently across different foreign policy issues. For example, when the US government develops workstreams on climate change, conflict mitigation, economic development, peace and security, health and nutrition, violence prevention, digital technology, and more, in each case the potential impact and role of children and youth should be a consistently considered and critical factor affecting design, decisions, and delivery. This practice is currently highly inconsistent across agencies. To ensure a better future, it is important to treat children and youth as central priorities.

B. Recommendations

Given the magnitude of the crises affecting children and youth everywhere and the gravity of inaction, we therefore propose the launch of a White House-led initiative. The recommendations reflect our learnings from previous presidential priorities that succeeded in elevating timely issues and integrating mechanisms systematically across US agencies for greater coordination, accountability, and impact.

1. Presidential Memorandum

To launch a US priority that has a lasting impact on children and youth everywhere, we recommend a Presidential Memorandum (or Executive Order) for the heads of executive departments and agencies to enhance the coordination of policies and programs to promote the well-being of children and youth.⁵⁴ The memorandum would outline the important advantages of

⁵⁴ The proposed Presidential Memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies with the purpose of enhancing coordination of policies and programs to promote the well-being of children and youth, could be modeled after the Presidential Memorandum of Policies and Programs to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls Globally, issued by President Barack Obama on January 30, 2013. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/30/presidential-memorandum-coordination-policies-and-programs-promote-gende>.

making young people a higher priority and layout actions for implementation across the US government.

Among the central actions, the Presidential memorandum would announce the creation of a White House Office and Senior Advisor for Children and Youth Globally (focusing domestically and internationally and with a deputy focused on children and a deputy focused on youth), plans for a whole of government US strategy for children and youth (with distinct attention to ages and stages), instructions for cabinet officials to designate senior officials (Ambassador level) within their front office and commit resources for the office, an approach for the US government to dedicate robust funds, and directives for integrating this policy and budget priority for example through a Cross-Agency Priority, Impact Statement for Children and Youth, and Best Interest of the Child standard. Many of these actions are described in further detail below. This approach is modeled after the success of the Presidential Memorandum that launched effective US government leadership for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls globally.

2. White House Office and Senior Advisor for Children and Youth Globally

To support the President's leadership and direction, we recommend naming a Senior Director on Children and Youth Globally who is also an Assistant to the President⁵⁵ and who leads an Office for Children and Youth at the White House that includes a senior lead for children and a senior lead for youth and that has a mandate that encompasses international and domestic issues.

The Senior Official would report to the President and work in consultation with the Vice President. The Office staff would have joint appointments with official roles at the Office and the National Security Council, Domestic Policy Council, and Office of Management and Budget, to facilitate coordination and bridge domestic and international decisions affecting young people. This approach is modeled on the staff configuration at the White House Gender Policy Council. The office would also include senior officials with distinct leadership roles for children and for youth, to ensure the different needs of children or youth receive adequate attention and neither are inadvertently neglected.

This White House Office on Children and Youth Globally would raise the profile and coordination of domestic and international issues affecting young people and their well-being. The Office would support and advance a whole-of-government strategy as outlined in the Presidential Memorandum (or Executive Order). The staff would facilitate leadership, coordination, and oversight of US activities relating to international and domestic children and youth issues, serve as principal advisor to the President on policy matters relating to young people, and carry the president's authority in working with cabinet secretaries and their senior staff. The Office would provide general oversight of the US budgets to implement a whole-of-government strategy and government-wide application of the Best Interest of the Child standard, Child Impact Statements, Cross Agency Priority, and key indicators.

The Office would promote a whole-of-government strategy that centers on a Whole Child and Whole of Life approach and give special attention to marginalized populations. Consideration would also include how to mitigate concurrent and unique vulnerabilities affecting children and youth and ways to ensure their best interests. As part of this portfolio, the Office would engage in

⁵⁵ An alternative would be for this Senior Advisor and the two deputies to be located within the Gender Policy Council or in another high-level office of the White House where both domestic and international issues are addressed.

meaningful consultations with stakeholders and experts including young people and others with distinct lived experiences, as well as civil society leaders, foreign government representatives, and multilateral organizations.

The White House Office on Children and Youth Globally would support interagency collaboration and communication to foster a coordinated federal response on issues affecting children and youth globally and would help prepare an annual report to Congress on progress and impact. The Office staff would coordinate closely with the National Security Council on international issues and with the Domestic Policy Council on domestic issues. In addition, the Office staff would coordinate with the OMB and other US agencies and departments to advance efforts for achieving greater equity as outlined in Executive Order 13985. Consistent with Section 6 of EO 13985, the Director of OMB should identify opportunities to elevate children and youth in the President's Budget Request to Congress.

3. Whole-of-Government Strategy on Children and Youth Globally

We recommend the White House Office on Children and Youth Globally support and facilitate a whole-of-government US Strategy on Children and Youth Globally, building on current US strategies and actions and giving distinct attention to ages and stages. This strategy would enhance and elevate the work relating to Public Law 109-95 and the US Government Special Advisor for Children in Adversity as well as the work led by the Agency Youth Coordinator, both at USAID; the work of the Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues currently undertaken through the Office of Global Youth Issues at the Department of State; and the work of the Secretary of Health and Human Services as head of the Children's Interagency Coordinating Council.

The strategy would reflect input from all relevant agencies and facilitate a more coordinated approach across agencies to meet the needs of children and youth globally, with intentional attention to both demographics. With support and coordination from the White House, the whole-of-government strategy would build on and help coalesce various US strategies, such as the congressionally mandated "Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity: A US Government Strategy for International Assistance," as well as other strategies focused on early childhood development, youth engagement, and more. In addition, the whole-of-government strategy would present a more comprehensive plan and review of US actions by integrating information on diplomatic efforts across the US foreign policy apparatus, identifying the target metrics across agencies, referencing relevant agency-specific instructions for implementation, and summarizing US budget allocations across agencies.

The strategy would lay out a US plan of action for 5 years, with opportunities for review and course correction as needed before it is updated and renewed after 5 years. As with other topics (for example to prevent and respond to gender-based violence), the White House Office could facilitate a domestically focused strategy and an internationally focused strategy.

With input from each agency, the White House Office on Children and Youth Globally would prepare an annual report for submission to the President on progress made in implementing the strategy as well as a version of the report for the US Congress and the public. Preparation of the strategy and annual report would include consultations with civil society experts including young people and affected communities, to ensure their expertise and perspectives help inform the policies and programs that affect them.

4. President's Interagency Council on Children and Youth Globally

We encourage establishing a President's Interagency Council on Children and Youth Globally which would convene cabinet officials (or their principal deputies) to track progress on the US Strategy and integrate issues affecting children as a priority across government departments and entities, policies, programs, and budgets.⁵⁶ The White House convening role and leadership would underscore the President's priority and facilitate a government-wide strategy, greater alignment, and consistent prioritization of issues affecting children everywhere.

In addition to facilitating government-wide coordination and collaboration, the Interagency Council would foster greater transparency on policy affecting children across agencies. The Council would examine a broad array of comprehensive and cross-cutting issues affecting child well-being, domestically and internationally, and would give special attention to the disproportionately negative impact of COVID-19, conflict, and climate on children in communities facing greater risks in the United States and around the world. Areas of special attention would include:

- Access to quality, inclusive education, and safe schools, including early childhood education
- Prevention of and recovery from sexual and other forms of violence, including trafficking
- Prevention of and recovery from online sexual exploitation and abuse
- Inclusion and support for children from marginalized and underserved communities
- Access to nutrition and safe water
- Access to hygiene and health care
- Access to safe homes and community support
- Heightened support during humanitarian crises and armed conflicts

In addition, the White House Office on Children and Youth Globally (with senior officials for children and for youth who wear dual hats with roles at the NSC, DPC, and OMB) would convene a standing interagency policy council on children and youth globally, which would facilitate greater coordination on policy guidance and institutional reforms. These officials would also participate in other White House-led policy councils to ensure integration and coordination on topics affecting children domestically and internationally; for example, the policy councils focused on the prevention of mass atrocities, climate change, gender equality, and digital technology. By working closely and collaboratively among multiple policy councils, the White House Office on Children and Youth Globally would facilitate broader conversations that enhance multiple US priorities.

5. Cabinet-level Leadership and Dedicated Office with Senior Official

To facilitate priority action that elevates and integrates issues affecting children and youth and that assures effective implementation of the US strategy, we recommend that each agency have an Ambassador-level official for Children and Youth Globally who is placed within the front office of and reports to the Secretary or Administrator and who has a deputy focused on children and a deputy focused on youth.

⁵⁶ As an alternative, we recommend that the White House Senior Advisory on Children and Youth Globally convene the Interagency Children's Coordinating Council on Children of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Within the Department of State, for example, there currently is not a leadership point of contact to coordinate and elevate agency activities relating to both children and youth. At the Department of State, a senior position for Children and Youth Globally (with the rank of Ambassador) would report directly to the Secretary, be located in the Secretary's front office, and lead an office that would include the US Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues and a similar position focused on children. The mandate would include attention to the distinct yet interrelated needs of young people during childhood, adolescence, and youth. In addition, the Secretary of State would issue agency-wide instructions with cables to US missions abroad, providing clear expectations for actions and reporting to make children and youth a systemic priority in US foreign diplomacy and policy. This approach would emulate the Secretary of State's actions to elevate and integrate issues affecting women, including an agency-wide instruction cable and the establishment, in the Secretary's front office, of the Office of Global Women's Issues led by an Ambassador-at-Large. Additionally, the Secretary of State would issue an agency-wide directive, similar to the Secretary of State's issuance of the "U.S. Department of State Policy Guidance: Promoting Gender Equality to Achieve Our National Security and Foreign Policy Objectives."⁵⁷

At the US Agency for International Development, a new senior position for Children and Youth Globally would report directly to the Administrator, be located in the Administrator's front office, and lead an office that would include both the US Government Special Advisor for Children in Adversity and the Agency Youth Coordinator. This office would work collaboratively within USAID, including with the technical agencies that are mandated to do development programming, to help elevate awareness and knowledge of the depth and breadth of the issue impacting young people. This approach would emulate the positioning and mandate of the Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

Similar efforts would take place at other agencies to provide agency-wide coordination, direction, and oversight of this priority. On issues affecting young people globally, agencies and departments involved would include, for example, not only the Department of State and USAID, but also the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Transportation, Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Justice, Peace Corps, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Inter-American Foundation, and more. The senior officials would contribute toward the design and implementation of a whole-of-government strategy; provide oversight and approval for policies, programs, and budgets; support agency implementation of the actions in the President's Memorandum (or Executive Order), such as applying the Best Interest of the Child standard, Child Impact Statements, Cross Agency Priority, and other elements of a whole-of-government strategy. They would also facilitate meaningful consultations with civil society experts, including children and youth.

In essence, the senior officials would serve as lead points of contact to strengthen actions at each agency and department and would coordinate closely with the White House Senior Advisor for Children and Youth Globally to promote a more coordinated government-wide approach that improves outcomes for young people everywhere and strengthens achievements of myriad US priorities. Currently, this level of attention at the highest ranks at each agency and department, and this type of intentional coordination across the US government does not exist. Without these structures and strategies, US efforts to address the needs of children and youth will most likely remain siloed or be treated as an afterthought; by not prioritizing children and youth, the US

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State Policy Guidance: Promoting Gender Equality to Achieve Our national Security and Foreign Policy Objectives, March 2012. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/189379.pdf>.

government is bypassing a critical opportunity to invest early in activities that not only enhance our nation's and world's well-being but also reduce future emergency expenditures.⁵⁸

6. White House Cross-Agency Priority on Children and Youth

Consistent with other presidential priorities and as a mechanism to track and prompt strategic investments in children, we recommend the Office of Management and Budget establish a Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) with instructions for federal funding streams that support the best interests of children and of youth. A CAP would help to quantify relevant investments across the entire federal budget. The OMB would provide the information to the White House Senior Director and agency leads, and would also make the data publicly available. Based on the budget analysis and evaluation, the OMB would provide the Senior Director for the Office of the President its recommendations for a budget that serves the best interests of children and of youth and enhances coordination, efficiencies, and impact across the US government.

This recommendation affecting investments in children is consistent with proposals by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) made in a report titled *Child Well-Being Key Considerations for Policymakers Including the Need for a Federal Cross-Agency Priority Goal*⁵⁹. This GAO report explored conditions for children in the United States and recommended the creation of a CAP for child well-being, given research that it was an area where the US government required increased coordination. The report, based on consultation with a wide array of experts, found that improving child well-being “requires attention to a multiplicity of interrelated factors that can contribute to child well-being and the role that families, communities, governmental and nongovernmental organizations play in caring for these children.” While focused on children domestically, the findings apply to US actions for children internationally.

A more recent GAO report, titled *Government Performance Management Key Considerations for Implementing Cross-Agency Priority Goals and Progress Addressing GAO Recommendations*⁶⁰, reiterated the recommendation to create a CAP goal to improve child well-being “to better address the needs of children in ways that take into account the interrelatedness of federal actions and policies that aim to improve child well-being.” A CAP goal of improving child well-being would increase the efficacy of US government policy for children across all US government agencies through shared indicators, data, and evaluation mechanisms and would result in better outcomes for children in this country and internationally. Because the CAP goal would apply to all federal agencies, including the Department of State and USAID, the impact would extend to children overseas in the context of US diplomacy and foreign assistance. The CAP goal would also instruct agencies to give similar attention to youth, with attention to ages and stages.

7. Transparent and Transformative Budget

To make the most of US taxpayer dollars and strategic investments, there must be significant and holistic investments in young people. Almost one-third of the world's population consists of

⁵⁸ Recently, World Vision and Ernst & Young Australia collaborated to assess the return on investment for global funding for children. This groundbreaking report will officially be released in June 2024 and is expected to show new numbers and a high return when foreign assistance investments are prioritized on the needs of children, directly and indirectly.

⁵⁹ “Child Well-Being Key Considerations for Policymakers Including the Need for a Federal Cross-Agency Priority Goal,” GAO-18-41SP, November 2017, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-41sp.pdf>.

⁶⁰ “Government Performance Management Key Considerations for Implementing Cross-Agency Priority Goals and Progress Addressing GAO Recommendations,” GAO-21-104704, September 2021, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/716998.pdf>.

children and almost half of the population in some countries is made up of children and youth.⁶¹ Investments in their critical, interconnected needs now are essential to address and prevent continued backsliding in areas that affect our future well-being and safety.

Only 1.4 percent of the proposed federal budget for Fiscal Year 2024 is for foreign assistance funding. Within the 1.4 percent, just 0.10 percent directly benefits children and young people globally. That's 0.0014% of the federal budget.⁶² And yet, investments in children are highly lucrative and result in a significant return on investment for every dollar spent to improve the lives of children and safeguard their well-being around the world.⁶³

- Every \$1 invested in international education delivers as much as \$15 in economic returns.⁶⁴
- Every \$1 invested to scale up early childhood development programs results in as much as \$68 in improved health, social, and economic outcomes.⁶⁵
- Every \$1 invested to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria delivers \$31 in health gains and economic returns.⁶⁶
- Every \$1 invested to support youth-led peacebuilding programs yields a \$5-\$10 return on investment.⁶⁷
- Every \$1 invested in nutrition results in up to \$35 in economic returns.⁶⁸

First Focus on Children provides comprehensive tracking of US budgets for children. In addition, World Vision and Ernst and Young Australia conducted recent analysis to determine the return on investment of foreign assistance funding focused on children. Their soon-to-be-released research is expected to provide updated numbers that show a high return when foreign assistance investments are prioritized on the needs of children.

Several initiatives would help improve investments for children and for youth globally.

- As described above, a CAP goal issued by the Office of Management and Budget would prompt clearer tracking and accountability for investments that directly and indirectly benefit children everywhere, with attention to ages and stages through youth.
- We recommend that financial expenditure tracking systems at the Department of State and USAID include an explicit focus on expenditures in US-funded foreign operations primarily benefitting or with secondary benefits distinctly for children (ages 0-17) and distinctly for youth (ages defined by USAID). Available funding figures have not been comprehensive, cannot always be broken down to account for whether they benefit children and or youth distinctly, and are often double counted in multiple categories. This lack of clarity and transparency makes accounting difficult, and it hinders inter- and intra-

⁶¹ Because Children Are Everyone's Business, The United Nations Global Compact, <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social/childrens-rights>.

⁶² "Children's Budget 2023", First Focus on Children, <https://firstfocus.org/resources/report/childrens-budget-2023>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "International Basic Education Funding Needs Fiscal Year 2022," GCE-US, <https://www.gce-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/International-Basic-Education-Letter-FY22.pdf>.

⁶⁵ García, et al., "The Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program," 2016.

⁶⁶ Reid, Michael, and Eric Goosby. "Securing Global Fund Replenishment to Avoid Another Cassandra Moment." *The Lancet Global Health* 10, no. 11 (2022). [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x\(22\)00392-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2214-109x(22)00392-8).

⁶⁷ Kumar, S., Olsen, S., Mallett, A., Prelis, S. (2023). Building Evidence for Peacebuilding Investments: A Snapshot of Youth-Led and Youth-Supporting Peacebuilding Programs in Kenya Yields Five to Ten-Fold Social Returns on Investment (SROI). (USAID). https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZZ8J.pdf.

⁶⁸ "Nutrition: Global Health." U.S. Agency for International Development, February 28, 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/global-health/health-areas/nutrition>.

agency coordination, including the ability to identify gaps in support and to coordinate and reduce overlapping implementation by different agencies in the same country contexts. We applaud the recent introduction of a budget marker to track investments for youth and would like to see age disaggregation for children and youth to facilitate a better understanding of US investments. The result could improve the analysis of how much foreign assistance is explicitly intended to support children or indirectly intended to address their needs and would facilitate assessments of funding impact and efficiencies.

- Major presidential priorities have been accompanied by transformative funding commitments. In this context, we encourage the White House to commit a meaningful investment in children globally, with inclusive and distinct attention to youth. Such an investment would support families everywhere and make our country, and our world, safer, and stronger.⁶⁹ For example, two presidential priority initiatives and their accompanying budgets:
 - Under President George W. Bush, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) began as a five-year bilateral commitment to support HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment programs in developing countries with an initial authorization to spend \$15 billion in five years (fiscal years 2004-2008). PEPFAR launched the largest-ever global health initiative dedicated to a single disease.⁷⁰ The 10 percent set aside of funding for support of orphans and vulnerable children has had an immense impact. To date, PEPFAR funding has totaled more than \$110 billion, with funding reaching \$6.9 billion in FY 2023 (see figure). The President requested \$6.8 billion for PEPFAR in FY 2024.⁷¹ The delay in PEPFAR reauthorization places at risk many life-saving investments for children who already face great threats.
 - In this Administration's first term, the White House's commitment to addressing gender and end gender-based violence included many impactful initiatives, such as the creation of the White House Gender Policy Council, the release of several government-wide strategies, and a budget proposal that would make the largest commitment ever to addressing gender-based violence and gender equity worldwide, providing nearly \$3 billion to advance gender equity and equality internationally. These initiatives have the potential for an enormously positive impact and we recommend a similar approach for children.

8. Impact Statements on Children and on Youth

Consistent with other presidential priorities, we encourage the use of proven mechanisms that help integrate new practices and cross-sectoral priorities. We recommend the adoption of Child Impact Statements and Youth Impact Statements as a consistent requirement to assess the impact that regulations, policies, programs, and budget decisions would have on children and youth.

⁶⁹ "Biden/Harris Budget Proposal Makes Unprecedented Commitment to Violence Prevention." Futures Without Violence, March 22, 2023, <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/bidenharris-budget-proposal-makes-unprecedented-commitment/>.

⁷⁰ Sessions, Myra. "Overview of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief," Center for Global Development, <https://www.cgdev.org/page/overview-president%E2%80%99s-emergency-plan-aids-relief-pepfar#:~:text=Authorized%20to%20spend%20%2415%20billion,dedicated%20to%20a%20single%20disease.>

⁷¹ "The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)." Kaiser Family Foundation, July 26, 2023, <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/the-u-s-presidents-emergency-plan-for-aids-relief-pepfar/#:~:text=To%20date%2C%20PEPFAR%20funding%20has,for%20PEPFAR%20in%20FY%202024.>

Similar to the environmental and gender analyses the federal government currently uses, impact statements on children and impact statements on youth would provide a systematic process to answer fundamental questions about outcomes, for example on health, education, safety, family and community unity, economic security and mobility, development, and identity. The impact statements would be designed to be both effective and easy to complete, so as not to create burdensome new processes. The information collected should specify the age stage (for example, infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth) and other demographic factors to enable future disaggregation and analysis to further many objectives of the federal government. The data could help reveal issues and structures that disproportionately affect young people from marginalized communities and help improve initiatives for key demographics.

These Impact Statements would improve the efficacy of US government programs, help hone clear indicators through which to assess US government policies and enhance the US government's capacity to track progress and avoid duplication and overlap. This tool could facilitate coordination and increase understanding of interdisciplinary and cross-agency factors.

The Impact Statements would be part of a broader agenda to advance children's and youth's well-being that include measures such as:

- Establish a Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goal on improving child and youth well-being
- Develop shared benchmarks to assess impact, based, for example, on factors in a "Best Interest of the Child" standard (see below)
- Compile and disaggregate data—including by age, disability, gender, identity as LGBTQIA+, race and ethnicity, and socio-economic status—to assess impact and reach
- Enhance leadership, authority, and budgets within and across agencies to focus on children and on youth to promote buy-in and provide technical support and
- Ensure accountability to the public and stakeholders, including children and youth.

9. "Best Interests of the Child"

The "Best Interest of the Child" is a principle of child protection and rights that has been applied in all 50 US states, the District of Columbia, US territories, and internationally. The Best Interests of the Child term generally references factors that contribute to children's safety, health, and well-being, and considers a child's growth stages from early childhood, through adolescence, and into their youth. The principle is utilized in some US practices.⁷² In addition, it is one of the four general guiding principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to non-discrimination, the best interests of the child/children, the right to survival and development, the right to express their views freely on issues affecting them and to have their views given due weight per their age and maturity.⁷³ By applying these principles, countries strive to improve policies for positive outcomes for children, families, and the rest of their citizens.

US policy has at times fallen short in advancing key indicators of child well-being, including those related to child health, poverty, protection, exposure to violence, access to healthy food, quality

⁷² First Focus on Children, Fact Sheet: "The Best Interest of the Child" Standard, August 2022. https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FactSheet_Fact-Sheet-The-Best-Interests-of-the-child-Standard.pdf.

⁷³ "Four principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child." UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/four-principles-convention-rights-child>.

inclusive education, and justice. Without a clear mandate, there will continue to be gaps in US policy decisions that impact children’s lives and well-being. By establishing this standard as a government-wide priority, each federal agency would be required to assess the Best Interests of the Child as a primary consideration for each policy that will affect them and would also engage in meaningful consultations with key stakeholders and experts, including children and youth.

Across the country and around the world, families and communities are grappling with how to support young people who are most affected by global crises. How the US responds has consequences for our future. This moment calls for historic leadership to prioritize children as well as youth everywhere, for their recovery, development, and well-being, and as the next generation of leaders.

IV. Conclusion

We stand at an important crossroads. Children, youth, and their families are grappling with the impact of confluent crises with critical consequences for our future. White House leadership at this pivotal time would be deeply meaningful to families, children, and youth everywhere. We urge the US government to launch a major White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth globally and sets us on a course to a better tomorrow. We recognize your commitment to meet the “tremendous challenges and the unprecedented opportunities”⁷⁴ to influence “the direction of our world and impact the security and prosperity of the American people for generations to come.”⁷⁵ We are confident that our proposal will help the United States government achieve that goal and look forward to continuing this conversation.

We stand ready to mobilize our members and networks to elevate the needs and voices of children and of youth so that together we forge a path for a brighter future for all of us. Thank you.

⁷⁴ National Security Strategy, The White House, October 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Annex One: Children and Youth in Relation to US Global Priorities

This section discusses the role of children and youth in the achievement and sustainability of some of your Administration’s key global priorities and high-profile topics.

- A. Democracy and good governance
- B. Conflict mitigation and sustainable peace and security
- C. Climate change response
- D. Equity and inclusion

A. Democracy and Good Governance

“History and common sense tell us that liberty, opportunity, and justice thrive in a democracy, not in an autocracy.”⁷⁶

Young people speak truth to power, prompt discourse, and build momentum to transform our world. There are myriad examples of children and youth who are leaders for freedom and drivers for reforms. Beginning in their childhood, Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg achieved global recognition and profoundly influenced political discourse around the world. In her early youth, Nadia Murad became an international advocate for exposing abuses and repression.

Democratic rights movements on every continent have been led, energized, and inspired by young people demanding change for more rights, equality, and justice. They sparked and strengthened the pro-democracy and human rights movements that culminated at Tiananmen Square, China; they organized during the Arab Spring movement that swept through northern Africa to claim more rights and stop government corruption; they ignited the women, life, freedom revolution in Iran to bring an end to repression; they were active participants in the Velvet Revolution in Czech Republic to build a new democracy; and they challenged and ended apartheid in South Africa to expand democratic rights to everyone. In the United States, students have been among the most effective organizers calling for civil rights, equality, justice, and climate action, and demanding an end to gun violence. In every instance, young people have demonstrated courage and conviction to raise their voices, be counted, and prompt reforms.

In recent years, many countries have experienced rapid backsliding in democracy and freedoms, expanded threats to civil discourse, and greater denial of rights. Freedom House reports at least thirty-three countries are now less free, noting that a majority of countries in Africa and Asia are “not free” and that Central Asia and Central Europe have seen, for the 19th consecutive year, an overall decline in democratic governance. Nevertheless, young people are among the most vocal and active leaders calling for better governance across diverse regions. They are the catalysts, champions, and emerging leaders for more inclusive rights and participatory democracies.

Increasing young people’s civic engagement and political participation is crucial to building inclusive societies and strong democratic institutions. Across the US government, there are a variety of effective yet largely disconnected initiatives to promote and enable more youth participation in democratic processes around the world. The Global Youth Democracy Network, Powered by the People (PxP), YouthPower2, and the youth segment during the Summit for Democracy (2020, 2023) all showcase the role of youth and provide tools to strengthen their participation in democratic processes around the world. The US Department of State’s Young Leaders programs— e.g. YALI, YLAI, YSEAL, and YPL – and

⁷⁶ President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., The Summit for Democracy, November 2022, <https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/>.

USAID's YouthPower2 and PxP initiatives provide evidence-based solutions to improve the capacity of youth-led and youth-serving organizations through a positive youth development approach.⁷⁷

Similarly, the US Strategy on Global Girls Civic and Political Participation seeks to increase girls' and young women's access to civic education; address the unique barriers that prevent them from participating in civic and political life; and elevate their voices as agents of change and leaders in their communities, countries, and on the global stage.⁷⁸ The US Government Special Advisor for Children in Adversity, the Agency Youth Coordinator at USAID, and the Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues at the US Department of State play critical roles in facilitating "meaningful consultation with young people on the formulation and implementation of relevant policies and program to build relationships and uplift the voices of youth making a difference at home and abroad."⁷⁹

The initiatives above embrace children and youth as active individuals and prepare them to be leaders who advance human rights and set a path for peace and security.⁸⁰ However, the voices and solutions of participating young people could be integrated more consistently in relevant processes across agencies; and the impact of policies on children and youth should be considered more systematically. A systemic process that promotes consistent assessment of potential consequences of policies on children and on youth and that considers their potential role as partners, would help prevent unintentional harm and strengthen outcomes for foreign policy priorities. We urge you to build on your actions with a White House-led initiative that treats young leaders as the future global protagonists and prioritizes children and youth across relevant policy, programming, and funding, including at the Department of State, USAID, and Department of Education, among others.

B. Conflict Mitigation and Sustainable Peace and Security

In many conflict-affected countries, children and youth are the majority population.⁸¹ Recent reports state that "468 million or more than 1 in 6 children worldwide live in areas affected by armed conflict."⁸² Grave violations against children in conflict, include forced recruitment, abduction, and sexual violence.⁸³ Young people are the most at risk from the consequences of violence and forced displacement and have the most to contribute to future, sustainable peace and development.⁸⁴

In the context of post-conflict and fragile settings, leaders often characterize youth as vulnerable victims in need of help or as dangerous and violent actors who threaten security.⁸⁵ The reality is more nuanced and should inform policy and programming. For example, a report by the Communities of Democracies that was spearheaded by former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright underscores the importance of

⁷⁷ <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>.

⁷⁸ US Strategy on Global Girls Civic and Political Participation 2023, US Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/reports/u-s-strategy-on-global-girls-civic-and-political-participation-2023/>.

⁷⁹ Office of Global Youth Issues. U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-public-diplomacy-and-public-affairs/office-of-global-youth-issues/>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ POLICY BRIEF: US foreign policy recommendations for children and youth affected by conflict, ChildFund International, https://www.childfund.org/globalassets/uploaded-files/newcf/impact/knowledge_center/whole-child-conflict-policy-brief.pdf

⁸² <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/new-figures-millions-of-children-live-in-conflict-zones>, Save the Children, June 2023.

⁸³ POLICY BRIEF: US foreign policy recommendations for children and youth affected by conflict, ChildFund International, https://www.childfund.org/globalassets/uploaded-files/newcf/impact/knowledge_center/whole-child-conflict-policy-brief.pdf.

⁸⁴ World Vision with Ernst and Young Australia recently concluded a new analysis to assess the return on investment of foreign assistance focused on children. This research is expected to show a high return when foreign assistance investments are prioritized on the needs of children.

⁸⁵ "The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities," UNICEF, <https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/role-youth-peacebuilding-challenges-and-opportunities#:~:text=They%20also%20have%20multi%2Dfaceted,entrepreneurs%20in%20the%20war%20zones>.

“empowering youth in politics, creating avenues for engagement, and reducing barriers for young people’s political and economic participation” as central to addressing the factors associated with violent extremism.⁸⁶ The report states that “countries with less youth participation in governance and a lack of youth empowerment programs have a high rate of their young population indoctrinated with extremist ideologies.” Effective policies around conflict prevention, mitigation, and response should assess, for example, where children and youth are excluded, are socially and politically marginalized, and are most susceptible to growing discontent, and where children and youth are included, considered, and engaged in ways that prepare them to play a key role in their society’s recovery, rebuilding, and stability.

Strengthening partnerships for a more peaceful society is acknowledged as a critical component for the successful implementation of the US Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, which is required by the bipartisan Global Fragility Act⁸⁷. The Strategy’s 10-year plans for priority partner countries and region, “represent a meaningful, long-term commitment by the United States to building the political and economic resilience of partner societies by making strategic investments in prevention to mitigate the underlying vulnerabilities that can lead to conflict and violence and are critical to achieving lasting peace.”⁸⁸ Recognizing the importance of young people in building lasting peace, the bipartisan Youth, Peace and Security Act⁸⁹ (YPS Act) calls on the US Department of State “to coordinate the development and implementation of a whole-of-government strategy to promote the inclusive and meaningful participation of youth in peace building and conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well as post-conflict and recovery efforts.” The YPS Act is consistent with United Nations Security Council resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security⁹⁰ and affirms that “young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.”

Antagonistic actors seek to influence countries with the world’s largest youth populations and to reach children and youth directly. Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and injustice can fuel political fragility, extremism, and disease outbreaks and threaten global economic growth and stability. These factors and more should drive efforts to prioritize young people in US policy, programming, and funding.

The policies above emphasize the benefits of engaging young people to support their meaningful participation in governance and society could be transformative; and that the early participation of children and youth could help build a foundation for long-term partnerships that promote more prosperous and peaceful societies. In fact, US national security hinges on investing in children and youth globally. A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help coordinate relevant policy, programming, and funding across appropriate US agencies, including the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security, among others. This legacy initiative would help create systemic, consistent practices to focus on children and youth, support their participation in civic discourse, and strengthen their healthy development and contributions to society.

C. Climate Change Response

The rapidly changing climate is one of the most pressing issues of our time with profound implications for children. Around the world, children and youth are among the strongest advocates organizing to demand

⁸⁶ Albright, Madeleine K., Frank, Cheryl, Jomaa, Mehdi, Piccone, Ted. Liberal Democracy and the Path to Peace and Security: A Report of the Community of Democracies and Security Dialogue, The Brookings Institution, September 2017.

⁸⁷ Global Fragility Act of 2019 (GFA) (Div. J, Title V, P.L. 116-94).

⁸⁸ Biden, Jr., Joseph R. President of the United States, The White House. Quotation from FACT SHEET: President Biden Submits to Congress 10-Year Plans to Implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, March 24, 2023.

⁸⁹ Youth, Peace, and Security Act of 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4838?s=1&r=51>,

<https://meng.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-meng-fitzpatrick-phillips-lawler-kamlager-dove-and-salazar>.

⁹⁰ United Nations Security Council resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020).

reforms and accountability. They understand that they will inherit the challenges and are active in finding and supporting effective solutions. Policies, programs, and investments will need to prepare for the estimated 4.2 billion children who will be born over the next 30 years.⁹¹

In every global region, nations are more frequently experiencing and preparing for mass population displacement, food insecurity, and health emergencies.⁹² Children are among the most vulnerable to climate and environmental shocks than adults based on a variety of factors such as those described below.⁹³ UNICEF reports that approximately 1 billion children—nearly half of the world’s children—live in high-risk countries due to climate change.⁹⁴

UNICEF highlights that climate and environmental hazards negatively affect children access to key essential services, which in turn reduces their resiliency and adaptive capacity and further increases their vulnerability to climate and environmental hazards. This vicious cycle simultaneously pushes the most vulnerable children deeper into poverty and further increases their risk of experiencing the worst and most life-threatening effects of climate change.⁹⁵ The life-threatening effects of severe poverty and displacement are described in Annex Two.

Understanding children’s vulnerability is critical to knowing the full impact of climate and environmental hazards on the well-being, resiliency, and survival of future generations.⁹⁶ We recognize that your Administration has undertaken important efforts through your *Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (2021)*, which requires a whole-of-government approach to address climate change. However, there has been a disconcerting absence of mention and attention to children and youth in the agency strategies available to date. This acute gap demonstrates once again the value of launching a new White House-led initiative to make children and youth a higher and consistent priority across all US agencies.

Given that the climate crisis is a defining challenge for this generation and is already having a devastating impact on the well-being of children and youth globally, US strategies and implementation plans must be informed by a special and nuanced understanding of where and how children and youth are uniquely vulnerable to this crisis. A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help coordinate relevant policy, programming, and funding across appropriate US agencies, including the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Agriculture, among others. This legacy initiative would help create systemic practices to address the effects of climate change on children’s and youth’s well-being and would support young people holistically, thus enhancing efforts for other US global priorities.

⁹¹ Action on the climate crisis: The climate crisis is a child rights issue, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/climate-action>.

⁹² Climate Change, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/climate-change>.

⁹³ “The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index,” UNICEF, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>.

⁹⁴ “One billion children at ‘extremely high risk’ of the impacts of the climate crisis,” UNICEF, August 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/one-billion-children-extremely-high-risk-impacts-climate-crisis-unicef#:~:text=Launched%20in%20collaboration%20with%20Fridays,%E2%80%9Cextremely%20high%20risk%E2%80%9D>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index,” UNICEF, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>.

D. Equity and Inclusion

To ensure inclusive approaches enable all children and youth not only to survive but also to thrive, special attention is required to the inclusion of marginalized and/or underrepresented groups⁹⁷. In the aftermath of global crises, children from marginalized and underrepresented groups are exponentially at greater risk of severe harm and disruptions to their development. This discrepancy exists within the context of profound challenges that disproportionately harm children in general, in comparison to older populations. At heightened risk, for example, are children with disabilities, survivors of violence, adolescent girls, minorities and indigenous children, LGBTQIA+ children, street connected children, children without family care, and children in economically disenfranchised communities. Youth are facing equally serious challenges.

The increase in societal hardships due to the confluence of crises has fueled further poverty, food insecurity, education loss, violence, displacement, and a deficit of life-saving medicines and health services.

- Children and youth with disabilities are now at heightened risk of exclusion, violence, and institutionalization. The sharp rise in orphanhood has increased risks of institutionalization, where children face severely life-threatening conditions and greater incidents of violence, food insecurity, and learning loss.⁹⁸ Fifteen percent of the world's population – at least one billion people – have some form of disability, whether present at birth or acquired later in life; and nearly 240 million are children.⁹⁹ Families and communities are struggling to offer care, support inclusion, and promote child protection and development.
- Girls are now at a disproportionately higher risk of child, early, and forced marriage, gender-based violence, and other forms of violence and sexual exploitation.¹⁰⁰ Girls who were unable to access education during the pandemic are more likely to have been unable to resume their studies, increasing their risk of future harm.¹⁰¹
- Incidents of violence based on their perceived sexual orientation and gender identities have risen, fueled by prejudice, discrimination, and unrest.¹⁰²
- More children and youth from underserved and marginalized communities are vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking and online exploitation and abuse.¹⁰³

Without specific attention and intentional actions focusing on children and on youth, the harmful consequences of recent crises will become progressively worse and have devastating consequences for our future.

More consistent consideration and consultations with young people also align with the Administration's emphasis on locally led initiatives to ensure those most affected are informing the design, decisions, and deployment of resources that affect them most. We appreciate the efforts underway through a series of

⁹⁷ Marginalized and/or underrepresented groups - groups that are disproportionately excluded from opportunities and systems (e.g., employment, political representation, education, basic services), often due to structural and societal obstacles and historical marginalization. Such groups may include, but are certainly not limited to, women; youth; children in adversity and their families; older persons; persons with disabilities; LGBTQI+3 people; displaced persons; migrants; Indigenous Peoples and communities; non-dominant religious, racial, and ethnic groups; people of castes traditionally considered lower; people of lower socioeconomic status; and people with unmet mental health needs. "Nothing Without Us: USAID Disability Policy" USAID 2023.

⁹⁸ Hillis S, N'konzi JN, Msemburi W, et al. Orphanhood and Caregiver Loss Among Children Based on New Global Excess COVID-19 Death Estimates. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2022;176(11):1145–1148. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3157.

⁹⁹ "Children with disabilities," UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/disabilities>.

¹⁰⁰ "Child marriage," UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>.

¹⁰¹ Hillis S, N'konzi JN, Msemburi W, et al. Orphanhood and Caregiver Loss Among Children Based on New Global Excess COVID-19 Death Estimates. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2022;176(11):1145–1148. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3157.

¹⁰² "World Bank. 2020. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Contexts Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence. © World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/33722> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO." <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/33722>.

¹⁰³ "Understanding Human Trafficking," Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/understanding-human-trafficking/>.

Executive Orders and work across agencies, in particular, the USAID Inclusive Development Hub and the Office of Children in Adversity. These actions affirm that societies are stronger when they benefit from diverse talent and input, promote meaningful participation and inclusion, and remove barriers to equity, access, and equal rights and protections.

More can be done, however, to ensure children and youth are not siloed from activities on broader issues affecting their future and to promote consistent consideration of children across US policy, programming, and funding. Despite the critical role of children and youth in the world and our future, they frequently remain an afterthought, and issues affecting them are often sidelined, disregarded, or overlooked in the development and implementation of decisions or are inconsistently addressed in US policy, programming, and funding. Centering children and youth—especially those from marginalized and underrepresented groups—is essential to achieve long-term national and global priorities. A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help coordinate efforts across relevant US agencies, including the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Defense, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice, among others. The initiative could help create systemic, consistent practices to support children holistically, raise the profile and attention to the needs of the most underserved and marginalized communities, and enhance efforts to achieve other US priorities.

Annex Two: Consequential Conditions that Threaten Future Generations

This section highlights a few focal areas where children are disproportionately affected and the implications are especially dire if left unattended. The information centers on the consequences of:

- A. Protracted effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic
- B. Disruption to education and learning
- C. Increase in violence against children
- D. Upsurge in displaced children
- E. Multi-dimensional poverty

A. Protracted Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The profound and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on children continues to threaten their development and our future. The results are well-documented and include severe backsliding in every sector that contributes to healthy human development. We know, for example, that:

- 1.6 billion children were affected by school closures¹⁰⁴ and the prevalence of illiteracy has increased. According to UNICEF, “in low- and middle-income countries, learning losses due to school closures have left up to 70 percent of 10-year-olds unable to read or understand a simple text, which is up from 53 percent pre-pandemic.”¹⁰⁵ USAID reports that among children who suffered education disruption, “many of them are likely to permanently drop-out.”¹⁰⁶
- An estimated 10.5 million children lost a parent or caregiver due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁷ The sharp rise in orphanhood increases the likelihood of delayed development, poverty, abuse, mental health challenges, reduced access to education, and institutionalization.¹⁰⁸
- The mental health crisis worldwide is especially prevalent among adolescents aged 10-19; a hardship that was exacerbated when mental health services were disrupted or halted in 93 percent of countries.¹⁰⁹ Evidence shows that COVID-19 “caused high rates of anxiety and depression among children and young people, with some studies finding that girls, adolescents, and those living in rural areas are most likely to experience these problems.”¹¹⁰
- More than 142 million children have been pushed into poverty and the number is still growing.¹¹¹ Food insecurity increased and 9 million suffered wasting, the most threatening form of malnutrition.¹¹² Growing evidence suggests that “wasting occurs very early in life and disproportionately affects children under 2 years of age.”¹¹³ More than 100 million children are experiencing multidimensional poverty due to a lack of clean water, sanitation, and hygiene.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁴ “Covid-19 and children”, UNICEF data hub, <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/#education>.

¹⁰⁵ “Covid:19 Scale of education loss ‘nearly insurmountable’, warns UNICEF”, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/covid19-scale-education-loss-nearly-insurmountable-warns-unicef>.

¹⁰⁶ “U.S. Government Guidance Note: Critical Action for the Protection and Care of Children in Adversity during the Covid-19 Pandemic,” U.S. Agency for International Development, last updated July 19, 2021, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/USG_Guidance_Note_on_Critical_Action_for_Children_in_Adversity_during_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_final_1.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Hillis S, N’konzi JN, Msemburi W, et al. Orphanhood and Caregiver Loss Among Children Based on New Global Excess COVID-19 Death Estimates. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2022;176(11):1145–1148. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3157.

¹⁰⁸ “Global Orphanhood Associated with Covid-19,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/covid-19/orphanhood/index.html>.

¹⁰⁹ “Covid:19 Scale of education loss ‘nearly insurmountable’, warns UNICEF”, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/covid19-scale-education-loss-nearly-insurmountable-warns-unicef>.

¹¹⁰ “U.S. Government Guidance Note: Critical Action for the Protection and Care of Children in Adversity during the Covid-19 Pandemic,” U.S. Agency for International Development, last updated July 19, 2021, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/USG_Guidance_Note_on_Critical_Action_for_Children_in_Adversity_during_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_final_1.pdf.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “Covid:19 Scale of education loss ‘nearly insurmountable’, warns UNICEF”, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/covid19-scale-education-loss-nearly-insurmountable-warns-unicef>.

¹¹³ “Nutrition and care for children with wasting,” UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/nutrition/child-wasting>.

¹¹⁴ <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/>.

- 1.8 billion children live in 104 countries where mental health services, violence prevention and response interventions, and maternal and child health and nutrition were interrupted, depriving children and their families of programs that prevent millions of deaths annually.¹¹⁵ Global vaccination rates fell drastically, leaving 25 million infants without lifesaving vaccines¹¹⁶. Since malnourished children have weakened immune systems, the delay in vaccinations and other critical interventions enabled common childhood illnesses to become deadly.¹¹⁷
- Violence against children has considerably increased, including sexual violence, gender-based violence, and online child sexual exploitation and abuse.^{118 119}
- Girls have experienced disproportionately high risks with sharp increases in child, early, and forced marriage, gender-based violence, and other forms of violence and exploitation.
- Children and youth with disabilities experienced great harm from the rise in orphanhood and risk of institutionalization with life-threatening conditions and with increases in violence, food insecurity, and learning loss. The experience of growing up without a family and related protections can be devastating.¹²⁰
- At heightened risk were young people in crisis and emergency settings, and historically marginalized groups.

The urgency of enhancing services to support children, youth, families, and communities cannot be overstated. USAID describes a resulting protection crisis for children: “Poverty exacerbates and increases the likelihood of violence and neglect, while lack of access to in-person education services decreases the opportunity to identify and refer vulnerable children to critical protective social services. Moreover, children who have lost one or both primary caregivers are at elevated risk of abuse, neglect, institutionalization, school drop-out, and trafficking, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.”¹²¹

A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help coordinate relevant policy, programming, and funding across relevant US agencies, including the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Health and Human Services, among others. This legacy initiative would create systemic, consistent practices that elevate children as a priority, assess their needs, and enhance efforts to achieve other US global priorities.

B. Disruption to Education and Learning

Millions of students were out of school in countries across the globe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; millions more remain out of school and face multiple barriers to education.¹²² An estimated 1.6

¹¹⁵ “Covid:19 Scale of education loss ‘nearly insurmountable’, warns UNICEF”, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/covid19-scale-education-loss-nearly-insurmountable-warns-unicef>.

¹¹⁶ COVID-19 pandemic fuels largest continued backslide in vaccinations in three decades, World Health Organization, 15 July 2022. <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-07-2022-covid-19-pandemic-fuels-largest-continued-backslide-in-vaccinations-in-three-decades>.

¹¹⁷ “Act now to prevent maternal and child deaths,” RESULTS, <https://results.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-RESULTS-Global-Poverty-Nutrition-Leave-Behind.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ “U.S. Government Guidance Note: Critical Action for the Protection and Care of Children in Adversity during the Covid-19 Pandemic,” U.S. Agency for International Development, last updated July 19, 2021, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/USG_Guidance_Note_on_Critical_Action_for_Children_in_Adversity_during_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_final_1.pdf.

¹¹⁹ “Child Sexual Abuse Has Become A Crisis Online,” ChildFund International, <https://www.takeitdown.childfund.org/#thumb-videos>

¹²⁰ Hillis S, N’konzi JN, Msemburi W, et al. Orphanhood and Caregiver Loss Among Children Based on New Global Excess COVID-19 Death Estimates. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2022;176(11):1145–1148. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3157.

¹²¹ “U.S. Government Guidance Note: Critical Action for the Protection and Care of Children in Adversity during the Covid-19 Pandemic,” U.S. Agency for International Development, last updated July 19, 2021, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/USG_Guidance_Note_on_Critical_Action_for_Children_in_Adversity_during_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_final_1.pdf.

¹²² “Meng, Quigley, and Fitzpatrick Introduce Resolution Affirming U.S. Support for Access to Education, Globally,” Global Campaign for Education US, January 24, 2023, <https://www.gce-us.org/meng-quigley-and-fitzpatrick-introduce-resolution-affirming-u-s-support-for-access-to-education-globally/>.

billion children were affected by school closures¹²³ and the prevalence of illiteracy has increased. UNICEF reports that learning losses due to school closures in low- and middle-income countries have left up to 70 percent of 10-year-olds unable to read or understand a simple text, which is up from 53 percent pre-pandemic.”¹²⁴ USAID reports that among children who suffered education disruption, “many of them are likely to permanently drop-out.”¹²⁵

The impact on learning is staggering and the multi-generational implications are sobering. A report by the World Bank, USAID, UNICEF, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and others indicates that about 70 percent of ten-year-olds worldwide—and 89 percent of ten-year-olds in Sub-Saharan Africa—now are unable to read and understand a simple written text.¹²⁶

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning loss emergency continues to transpire. More than 224 million children globally are affected by crises and in need of urgent educational support; this figure has nearly tripled from an estimated 75 million children in 2016.¹²⁷ Humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ukraine have exacerbated the education loss in these emergencies.

Access to education “is critical for reducing poverty, improving peace and security, and increasing economic prosperity.”¹²⁸ Such dire learning loss will cause a multitude of future problems relating to health, violence, economic opportunity, and regional stability. The economic impact is estimated to be \$21 trillion in lifetime earnings. These alarming numbers will only increase if education is not prioritized in funding.¹²⁹

Among those most affected are girls who were forced to leave school and were later unable to resume their studies. The Global Campaign for Education-US reports that “Girls are more likely to have to stay at home and tend to younger siblings and other household chores, and 1 in 3 girls in the developing world are married before the age of 18. Ultimately, their earnings are often tied to the men in their lives from fathers and brothers to husbands and sons.” Evidence demonstrates a high return on investment for girls’ education. If every girl worldwide received 12 years of quality education, then the lifetime earnings for women could increase by US \$15 trillion. In addition, each additional school year can increase a woman’s earnings by 10% to 20% toward her future annual income, and adult girls are more likely to invest a far larger percentage of their income back into their family.¹³⁰

In addition to girls, many marginalized groups have been especially hard hit by disruptions in education. In particular, many children with disabilities faced education losses due to the inability to access necessary accommodations, specialized learning tools, and therapeutic services. The potential impact on

¹²³ “Covid-19 and children”, UNICEF data hub, <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/#education>.

¹²⁴ “Covid:19 Scale of education loss ‘nearly insurmountable’, warns UNICEF”, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/covid19-scale-education-loss-nearly-insurmountable-warns-unicef>.

¹²⁵ “U.S. Government Guidance Note: Critical Action for the Protection and Care of Children in Adversity during the Covid-19 Pandemic,” U.S. Agency for International Development, last updated July 19, 2021, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/USG_Guidance_Note_on_Critical_Action_for_Children_in_Adversity_during_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_final_1.pdf.

¹²⁶ “70% of 10-Year-Olds now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text,” World Bank, June 23, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/23/70-of-10-year-olds-now-in-learning-poverty-unable-to-read-and-understand-a-simple-text>.

¹²⁷ “Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives,” Education Cannot Wait, June 2023,

https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/new_global_estimates_and_thematic_deep_dives.pdf.

¹²⁸ Congresswoman Grace Meng, citation from “Meng, Quigley, And Fitzpatrick Introduce Resolution Affirming U.S. Support For Access To Education, Globally,” Global Campaign for Education – US, January 24, 2023, <https://meng.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/meng-quigley-and-fitzpatrick-introduce-resolution-affirming-us-support-0>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “Giving girls a chance,” Global Campaign for Education-US, <https://www.gce-us.org/girls-education/#:~:text=One%20additional%20school%20year%20can,future%20and%20their%20country%27s%20future>

infants is also severe. The delivery of inclusive, quality early childhood development (ECD) programs was interrupted. ECD programs are essential for healthy growth and provide long-term positive benefits. Studies show that children and families participating in ECD initiatives improve their capacity to achieve healthy growth, access quality nutrition, grow up in nurturing family-based care, participate in inclusive development and learning, and improve their protection from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

The US Government Strategy on International Basic Education recognizes that “education promotes positive socio-economic progress and enhances standards of living.” The strategy seeks “to expand access to quality basic education for all, particularly marginalized and vulnerable populations who are at increased risk of not returning to school.” The 2023 strategy represents an interagency effort involving the Departments of Defense, Education, Labor, State, Treasury, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Peace Corps, and USAID. The 2023 strategy also acknowledges the urgency of these investments and the risks associated with the enormous education loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These actions align with the implementation of the bipartisan Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development (READ) Act, which also established a senior coordinator and requires an annual report to Congress.¹³¹

Recent estimates demonstrate that school closures during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic affected 1.6 billion learners, putting them at risk of losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings. That is the equivalent of 14% of today’s GDP.¹³² Child labor rates rose to 160 million, the first increase the world has seen in two decades. This includes a significant uptick in children engaged in hazardous work between the ages of 5 to 11 years old, who are at risk for physical and mental harm due as well as more limited educational opportunities.¹³³

Very early adolescents and older adolescents have very different needs in terms of education and skills-building, as well as in their ability to safely engage in the labor force, and approaches to their development should take these important life stages into account. In addition, marginalized young people such as those with disabilities or young people who are forcibly displaced due to conflict or climate change often have limited access to education, training, and fair labor opportunities.¹³⁴

The jobs of tomorrow are likely to be rooted in green and/or technology skills, and policies, programs, and funding to support young people and the development of their skills should take into account emerging fields, roles, and the desires of young people themselves for their futures and careers. The youth NEET rate (the share of youth neither engaged in employment nor education or training)¹³⁵ can provide valuable insight into a country’s investments in young people. Given their contributions to society, youth should be considered equal assets today, not as future workers or future citizens, but as individuals who can contribute to today’s discussions about the labor force and key policy decisions that will impact their ability to access quality education and secure employment opportunities.

A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help coordinate relevant policy, programming, and funding across appropriate US agencies, including the Department of State, USAID,

¹³¹ US Government Strategy on International Education, Fiscal Year 2019-2023. <https://www.usaid.gov/reports/international-basic-education-strategy/fy-2021>.

¹³² https://://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/the-state-of-the-global-education-crisis-a-path-to-recovery?cq_ck=1638565414093.

¹³³ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/child-labour-rises-160-million-first-increase-two-decades>.

¹³⁴ UNHCR, Starting Out - Why education for refugees matters, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/starting-out-why-education-refugees-matters>; and UNICEF, Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>.

¹³⁵ OECD, Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), <https://data.oecd.org/youthinac/youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet.htm>.

Department of Labor, and the Department of Education, among others. This initiative would help create systemic, consistent practices to ensure access to inclusive education, provide early childhood development services, ensure young people have access to job-relevant skills and training, and foster greater equality. The initiative would support children and youth holistically through their distinct life stages and strengthen efforts to achieve other US global priorities.

C. Increase in Violence Against Children

The convergence of crises—including COVID-19, climate, and conflicts—has sharply increased the incidents of child marriage, child labor, and many forms of online and offline violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. Half of the world’s children—nearly one billion—are victims of violence annually. Violence against children includes physical, emotional, and sexual violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Globally, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 13 boys have been sexually exploited or abused before reaching the age of 18.¹³⁶ Children with disabilities are more likely to experience severe physical harm and may have an increased risk of sexual violence. Also at heightened risk are the 10.5 million children worldwide who have lost a caregiver due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³⁷ Reports indicate that economic hardships, orphanhood, food insecurity, and forced displacement have caused a sharp rise in dangerous, abusive forms of child labor, child trafficking, and other forms of violence and exploitation. Children from marginalized and underserved communities face much higher risks of exposure to violence.

The evidence is clear that violence is a major public health issue in addition to being a critical human rights concern. A growing body of research shows that adverse childhood experiences impact the healthy brain development of children, affecting their lifelong health¹³⁸, well-being, and future education and employment opportunities. Repeated exposure to violence in childhood can impede a child’s ability to succeed in school and increase their vulnerability to becoming a victim or perpetrator.

In recent years, the Internet has exploded the incidents of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children and Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM). CSAM is content that depicts sexually explicit activities involving a child. These crimes increasingly involve younger victims and have become more violent. In 2022, the cases of CSAM reported to US authorities increased to 32 million unique files, marking a 47 percent increase over two years.¹³⁹ Almost 60 percent of victims were prepubescent and 8 percent were infants or toddlers.¹⁴⁰ This devastating crime has severe and lifelong consequences for survivors and the sharing of CSAM contributes to their re-traumatization long after the abuse has ended.¹⁴¹

We applaud your Administration’s commitment to expanding understanding about the prevalent forms of violence globally and their impact on the health and well-being of children and youth. The White House Gender Policy Council launched excellent whole-of-government initiatives to address gender-based violence and related abuses. In addition, the recently established White House Task Force to Address

¹³⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund, “Ending online child sexual exploitation and abuse: Lessons learned and promising practices in low- and middle-income countries,” UNICEF, December 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/media/113731/file/Ending%20Online%20Sexual%20Exploitation%20and%20Abuse.pdf>.

¹³⁷ Hillis S, N’konzi JN, Msemburi W, et al. Orphanhood and Caregiver Loss Among Children Based on New Global Excess COVID-19 Death Estimates. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2022;176(11):1145–1148. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3157.

¹³⁸ Jim Mercy, “CDC Measures Violence against Children, Sparks Action,” CDC Foundation blog post, November 25, 2013.

¹³⁹ “Cyber Tipline 2022 Report,” National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, <https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/cybertipline/cybertiplinedata#archives>.

¹⁴⁰ ChildFund, “Take it Down,” 2023, <https://www.takeitdown.childfund.org/#thumb-videos>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Online Harassment and Abuse will help “develop concrete actions in a Blueprint to prevent online harassment and abuse, provide support for survivors, increase accountability, and expand research.”¹⁴² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention expanded the Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys that measure physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children and youth ages 13-24. PEPFAR prioritizes understanding, preventing, and responding to sexual violence and HIV, particularly among children and youth through various interventions such as the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) program which focuses on adolescent girls and young Women. The USAID Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity strategy provides essential guidance for a whole-of-government approach to invest in the development, care, dignity, and safety of vulnerable children and their families. The Cyber Crime Center’s (C3’s) Child Exploitation Investigations Unit, led by the Department of Homeland Security, also plays an important role.

While these are welcome efforts and much-needed investments, their influence and full integration across agencies remains limited and the dedicated investments for children pale in comparison to the extent of the existential threat to this essential population for the world’s future. A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help coordinate and strengthen actions across key agencies, including the Department of State, USAID, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, and Department of Justice, among others. This legacy initiative would help create systemic, consistent practices to protect children, prevent violent crimes against them, and thus enhance efforts to achieve other US global priorities.

D. Upsurge in Displaced Children

Among the most vulnerable to violence, exploitation, malnutrition, and trafficking are children on the move. Their displacement threatens their future, creates instability, and lifelong trauma rooted in uncertainty and fear. What is certain is their exposure to a wide range of violence, abuse, exploitation, loss, and neglect. A growing concern among displaced and refugee children—especially for girls—is child, early, and forced marriage, and other forms of gender-based violence.¹⁴³

While children make up almost one-third of the global population, they constituted more than 41 percent of the world’s refugees in 2022.¹⁴⁴ Worldwide, more than 43.3 million children were displaced by conflict and violence through 2022, including some 17.5 million child refugees and asylum seekers and an estimated 25.8 million children displaced within their own country by violence and conflict. Another 3.8 million more children were living in internal displacement as a consequence of natural disasters.¹⁴⁵

Without concerted and strategic investments, experts estimate that the potential cost to the global economy may total \$21 trillion in lost lifetime earnings of today’s student generation.¹⁴⁶ A compassionate and effective response to the growing population of refugees and displaced persons must include strategies to meet the needs of children and youth and protect against isolation, exclusion, and abuse.

¹⁴² Executive Summary: Initial Blueprint for the White House Task Force to Address Online Harassment and Abuse, The White House, March 3, 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/03/executive-summary-initial-blueprint-for-the-white-house-task-force-to-address-online-harassment-and-abuse/>.

¹⁴³ “Child Marriage: The Devastating End of Childhood,” Save the Children, <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-marriage-a-violation-of-child-rights>.

¹⁴⁴ “Child displacement,” UNICEF data hub, last updated June 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ “70% of 10-Year-Olds now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text,” World Bank, June 23, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/23/70-of-10-year-olds-now-in-learning-poverty-unable-to-read-and-understand-a-simple-text>.

A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help elevate the issues within agencies and foster coordination across the US government to meet the needs of children and youth on the move in a holistic manner. With support from the White House, an interagency process and strategy that addresses children could help align efforts by the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Health and Human Services, among others. This legacy initiative would help create systemic, consistent practices to support children and enhance efforts to achieve other US priorities.

E. Multi-Dimensional Poverty

Children are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than adults and they are more vulnerable to the effects of poverty.¹⁴⁷ Without proper nutrition, children cannot grow up healthy and reach their full potential. Children who grow up impoverished suffer poor living standards, develop fewer skills for the workforce, and earn lower wages than adults.¹⁴⁸

The confluence of crises—especially COVID-19, climate change, and armed conflicts—has augmented the risk factors, displacing millions of children from their homes and exacerbating the conditions that lead to poverty and the spread of infection. The vast majority of children living in poverty die from preventable causes, including malnutrition, pneumonia, and diarrhea.¹⁴⁹

Around the world, 1 billion children experience multi-dimensional poverty, which means they lack basic nutrition, clean water, and other necessities for survival. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional 100 million children globally now are living in multi-dimensional poverty.¹⁵⁰

Globally, more than 13 million children under age five suffer severe wasting, which is acute malnutrition that threatens their health and future. Severe wasting critically weakens the immune system, leaving children exceptionally vulnerable to disease, developmental delays, and death. These children are up to eleven times more likely than their better-off peers to die of treatable infections and diseases.¹⁵¹

The prevalence of severe malnutrition, lack of nutrition and health interventions, scarcity of clean water and sanitation, and massive displacement and orphanhood together form a humanitarian crisis with deadly and dire consequences for children, youth, and future generations. Without emergency and strategic interventions, this confluence of humanitarian crises will evolve to pose serious problems for national economies, regional disease control, and global stability. Despite the predictable outcomes, few governments have set the elimination of child poverty as a viable national and global priority.

A new White House-led initiative that prioritizes children and youth would help coordinate relevant policy, programming, and funding across appropriate US agencies, including the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Health and Human Services, among others. This legacy initiative would help create systemic, consistent practices to address preventable deaths and support children and youth holistically, thus enhancing efforts to achieve other US global priorities.

¹⁴⁷ “Child Poverty,” UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty>.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ “Act now to prevent maternal and child deaths,” RESULTS, <https://results.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-RESULTS-Global-Poverty-Nutrition-Leave-Behind.pdf>.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ “The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index,” UNICEF, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>.

Annex Three: Acknowledgements

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