

**ChildFund Australia submission
to the 2022 October Budget Update**

Recommendations

ChildFund Australia is pleased to submit this pre-budget submission for the 2022-2023 period. In this document we propose 11 areas for investment, to strengthen existing commitments and to maximise impact for children and young people in Australia and across the region.

Proposal	Recommendations to the Australian Government
1. Children and Young People at the Centre of Official Development Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicate resources to the development and implementation of a national child poverty strategy to improve the lives and life chances of vulnerable children in Australia. • Resource the establishment of a dedicated unit within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to design, implement and monitor a child and youth strategy. • Establish a children’s desk within DFAT to gather and refer critical information, draft Ministerial updates, liaise with Ambassadors and provide advice as required.
2. Ending Violence Against Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a formal public commitment to becoming an End Violence Pathfinding Country and commit resources to galvanise action including the appointment of a senior official focal point, and collecting, organizing, and analysing disaggregated data on violence against children (VAC). • Commit resources to supporting other Pathfinding countries across the region to build integrated responses to VAC, in particular PNG. • Publicly release budget data on the percentage spend on EVAC and EVAW initiatives as percentage of ODA.
3. Keep Children and Young People Safe Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource the design and implementation of a domestic digital inclusion strategy to ensure that all individuals and communities, including those most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies across Australia. • Maintain current funding commitments to DFAT’s Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program to strengthen online safety across the region. • Resource the development of bespoke tools/apps to educate children and young people in Australia and across the region on the core competencies to stay safe online. • Resource comprehensive data collection on Pacific children and young people’s experiences online to inform policy, program investment and prevention strategies.
4. Disaster Proofing Education in the Pacific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource disaster resilience education in schools across the Pacific, to complement existing investment in strengthening school infrastructure. • Dedicate targeted resources to integrating education into humanitarian responses under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership Program.
5. Improve Access to COVID-19 Vaccinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend funding for the Vaccine Access and Health Security Initiative (VAHSI) to 2025-26 under the second phase of the Indo-Pacific Region Health Security Initiative

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invests an additional \$50 million to address vaccine hesitancy through education and awareness campaigns, mobilising community health workers, equipping health professionals with training, and strengthening partnership with community-led organisations in the region. • Continue financial contributions to the global COVAX facility (\$250 million) and vaccine sharing (20 million vaccines).
6. Resilient Health Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute \$330 (AUD) million the 7th replenishment of The Global Fund to raise USD \$18 billion in order to get the world back on track toward ending HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria and to build resilient, equitable, and sustainable systems. • Ear mark funding for pilot programs to strengthen regional health systems in priority countries such as PNG (for example, adapting Village Health Volunteer model to reduce the burden of main healthcare system) which doubles in impact in its contribution to Disaster Risk Management outcomes.
7. Protecting Children in Humanitarian Emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase total investment in humanitarian aid in respond to intensified need and complexity, proportionate to need in multiple and protracted emergencies.
8. Food security and Fighting Famine	<p>We support recommendations made by ACFID to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a Global Food Security Strategy that provides urgent hunger relief and averts famine, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an immediate response for urgent famine prevention of \$150 million in critical hunger hotspots: Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and the Horn of Africa. - Support for global efforts to address the root causes of food insecurity by investing \$200 million annually over 3 years initially in prevention and resilience. - Appointment of a Food Security Special Envoy to champion the food security agenda and to lead Australia’s international engagement.
9. Life-saving interventions for children in emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicate targeted resources to strengthen Child Protection in Emergencies practice and programming under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership.
10. Improving an approach to Disaster Risk Management	<p>ChildFund Australia recommends that the Australian Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a whole of government approach to prevention and risk reduction across its domestic policy and its international aid and development policy. • Consider options to develop a prevention fund to resource local prevention programs across Australia and the Pacific, including for First Nations peoples and youth leaders.
11. Protect children in armed conflict – Myanmar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding for humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, by providing a further \$16 million (USD) in the 2022-2023 budget update implemented via the Australian Humanitarian Program

Introduction

ChildFund Australia is an independent international development organisation that works to reduce poverty for children in developing communities. We partner to create community and systems change which enables vulnerable children and young people, in all their diversity, to assert and realise their rights.

ChildFund Australia directly implements programs with a range of local partners in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, and other Pacific nations, and manages projects delivered by partner organisations throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas.

ChildFund Australia is a member of the ChildFund Alliance – a global network of 12 organisations, which assists close to 23 million children and families in over 70 countries.

ChildFund Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Federal Government October Budget Update. As a child and youth focused development agency we recognise that children and young people are central to addressing key development challenges now and into the future. They are important agents of current development investments, have the most to gain as the generation that will reach adulthood during the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

Investing in children and young people must be an integral part of any international development strategy and approach. As such, we provide recommendations to the Budget Update based on our enduring relationships and expertise across the region and as informed by our global programs and policy work with and for children and young people, and their communities.

We note the recommendations made throughout ChildFund Australia’s submission are done so in the context of a number of defining mega-trends including:

- the Covid19 pandemic and related economic contraction/recession
- geostrategic competition in the Pacific region
- an increasing youth demographic (youth bulge)
- environmental crisis and resource scarcity
- protracted and complex conflicts; and
- mass migration and mass scale displacement (a predicted 200 million people displaced by 2050 due to climate change)¹
- chronic food insecurity
- massive digitisation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analytics
- generational inequality
- widening inequalities within a generation

An approach to aid investment that embeds child rights is not only consistent with Australia’s international commitments but is known to lead to stronger and more sustainable human development outcomes. Creating meaningful gains for children and young people is essential to driving impact in Australia’s international aid and development program. Our recommendations support such an approach.

We also acknowledge the critical importance of ANCP investment in our programming work for children and young people, and the realisation of their rights. The flexible nature of this longstanding program works to address the needs of children and young people as our primary stakeholders, their

families and communities and our local partners, as well as the strategic intent of ChildFund Australia.

There is ample evidence of what programming works for children and young people. However, across Australia's aid and development efforts, understanding of expenditure and programming remains fragmented and scarce in proportion to need and strategic aspirations. To ensure children and young people are not overlooked, they must be prioritised and visible. As advised by the United Nations Committee on the Convention of the Rights of the child (UN CRC Committee):

“The Committee reiterates that prioritizing children’s rights in budgets, at both national and subnational levels, as required by the Convention, contributes not only to realizing those rights, but also to long-lasting positive impacts on future economic growth, sustainable and inclusive development, and social cohesion.”²

² General comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children’s rights (art. 4)

Children and Young People at the Centre of Official Development Aid

ChildFund Australia welcomes the commitment from the Australian Government to boost aid in the Pacific and Timor Leste, alongside measures committed to South-East Asian aid. ChildFund also further welcomes commitments from the Australian Government to ensure that at least 80 per cent of aid spending addresses gender issues³, including tackling violence against women and girls.

At this important juncture there is an opportunity to provide greater clarity and coherence through our foreign policy and international aid investments. Investing in children across their life cycle has positive dividends for whole societies. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a roadmap for creating a better future, and recognize a link between early childhood development, healthy adolescents and equity, productivity, wealth creation, sustainable growth and a more peaceful future.

This was recently reinforced at the United Nations General Assembly, whereby a report on the status of the Convention on the Right of the Child stated:

“A child rights approach is critical to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda [for Sustainable Development] and its pledge to leave no one behind, including...children facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and children in other disadvantaged situations, many of which have been further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic”⁴

In the midst of a data revolution children and young people, particularly those in low-income countries, are not visible or counted in Australia’s work to create lasting peace and stability. Without targeted strategic intent for children and young people across the region, with no DFAT focal point or specific policy markers, it will remain difficult to direct or measure impact.

This is a challenge that is entirely possible to overcome and is an investment that seeks to deepen the quality of aid and development spends. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) already track aid investments in infrastructure, women, and the private sector, with strategy and policy markers for gender for example. These changes are already well advanced in other donor governments. The NZ Government has established a *Child & Youth Well-Being Strategic Action Plan 2021 – 2025* to improve sustainable development outcomes for children and young people.⁵ The Canadian Government has long set policy markers for areas like children’s issues, youth issues, indigenous issues, disability and more to track issues.⁶

Children and young people are critical to the pursuit of development across our region, and a failure to recognise this also reflects a failure to hear Pacific nations. For example, the *Pacific Youth Development Framework* states its intent to increase targeted investment to address priority youth development issues, and the benefit this will have both on Pacific communities as a whole, and in

³See: <https://www.pennywong.com.au/media-hub/speeches/speech-to-the-micah-annual-women-leaders-breakfast-adelaide-25-03-2022/>

⁴ United Nations General Assembly (2021). *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Report of the Secretary-General*. A/76/305. View at; <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/167/03/PDF/N2116703.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ See: https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Aid-Prog-docs/Child_Youth-Well-being-Strategic-Action-Plan.pdf

⁶ See: Global Affairs Canada - https://www.international.gc.ca/development-developpement/partners-partenaires/bt-oa/sectorcoding_policy-codageprojets_politiques.aspx?lang=eng#:~:text=Policy%20markers%20are%20qualitative%20tags,captured%20through%20other%20coding%20tables.

delivering sustainable development with greater economic benefit.⁷ The strategy came off the back of very little improvement in outcomes for young people and stated “Without major investment in young people, they may well flounder as a generation, undermining the capacity of Pacific Island countries and territories to escape aid dependence and develop economically.”⁸

Investment in children and young people also makes good economic sense, as suggested by the wealth of literature that highlights the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions and support. The World Bank advises that no other development investment demonstrates a higher payoff for people and economies than investing in early childhood development.⁹ This claim is underpinned by findings in neuroscience and evidence globally that early childhood experiences have a profound impact on people and their subsequent ability to thrive across lifecycles.

Dubbed ‘Second Decade, Second Chance’ by the World Health Organisation, adolescence is an equally critical period of growth and development, coupled with an increase in vulnerability to a range of risks.¹⁰ Adolescence and early adulthood is a critical development window where rapid biological and psychosocial changes take place, a period of growth second only to early childhood, essential to laying foundations for adulthood. Investment in adolescence can reverse early-life ‘deficits’, and as a time of growth and development, including of significant brain development, adolescence remains a time of possibilities rather than of already-determined outcomes.

A child and youth specific approach will result in greater development and humanitarian impact. Clearly children and young people experience poverty, marginalisation and inequality differently to adults by virtue of different stages of development and maturity. This requires an intentional and targeted approach to meet their needs. Even then, children and young people are not a homogenous group, who as they develop have evolving capacity. A 16-year-old has different needs and capacities than a 10-year-old or than a 6-year-old child and so on. With the evolution of the capacity, context changes. For example, the role of parents and other significant adults shift across the life cycle. Adolescence is one such stage in which young people experience increasing levels of independence, coupled with ongoing development of their capacity. This heightened independence often changes the role of family in their lives, shifting it from a central protective factor to one alongside several other factors such as friends, partners, other adult role models, self-identity and more. This has far reaching implications for programmatic impact and relevance as it . inherently changes the approaches that may be most applicable and necessitates a specific focus on both children and young people, in context of their unique stage of development to back in positive life trajectories.

It must also be recognised that a lifecycle approach must also be an intersectional approach. To measure and have impact for children and young people also means recognition that structural inequalities, such as those based on gender, disability, race, ethnicity for example, impact on

⁷ Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2015). The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: A coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific. View at:

https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/resources/2018-05/Pacific_Youth_Development_Framework.pdf

⁸ Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2015). The Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: A coordinated approach to youth-centred development in the Pacific. View

at:https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/resources/2018-05/Pacific_Youth_Development_Framework.pdf. p.6

⁹ World Bank, (n.d). Early Childhood Development: A Smart Investment for Life. View at:

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/early-childhooddevelopment-smart-investment-life>

¹⁰ World Health Organisation (2014) Health for the World’s Adolescents A second chance in the second decade., WHO Press, Geneva.

particular children who are the most marginalised and discriminated against. They face disproportionate vulnerability and exclusion from education, health and other inputs critical to their development. This calls for intersectional approaches to engage children, young people and their communities in addressing structural barriers to their equal participation in development processes.

Another reason for warranting a specific focus is the fact of the sheer number of children and young people in low to middle incomes countries. Surges in population growth through the Asia Pacific has resulted in what is termed ‘the youth bulge’. In South-East Asia, as at 2020, children and young people aged 24 and under are estimated to account for 42% of the population, and in Oceania (excluding New Zealand and Australia) they account for more than half of the total population (53%).¹¹ Such a demographic phenomenon will have a large impact on every development area and provides both opportunities and risks. As described by the Lowy Institute, ‘The future political and economic trajectory of our immediate Pacific region will ultimately depend on supporting the younger generations, not only in regard to economic participation, but also in their political and social aspirations’¹²

There is also evidence to suggest that Australia’s aid and development investment has become skewed to the detriment of children and young people, and therefore their communities and development progress. A recent research report seeking to quantify and assess Australia’s aid found that Australia’s investment in children in the aid program was the least generous in absolute terms when compared with similar countries (Sweden, UK, Norway, and Canada).¹³ The report also found the Indo-pacific is not on track to achieve 11 child-focussed indicators of the sustainable development goals.

The Australian Government can act now so that new spends in South-East Asia and the Pacific are clear on outcomes for children and young people. With the imminence of the next development strategy, the Australian Government can ensure that children and young people are visible and accounted for, with clear strategic intent and targeted commitments. The stated commitments from Minister Wong in May 2022 to ensure that at least 80% of aid spending addresses gender issues can be in part directed to girls and young women within the target. The Ministers responsible can also issue a review to evaluate Australia’s development assistance to progress the rights of children and young people, in order to inform the next development strategy. This work would be guided by a focal point within DFAT, who could develop child-centred policies and establish dedicated resources to oversee the mainstreaming of child rights across all thematic areas of the development and development cooperation programs.

Child poverty and inequality is not just undermining children’s rights in the Global South, but is undermining the life opportunities of children and young people right here, right now in Australia. We share the Australian Government’s commitment to “leave no one behind”. As such, we urge the Australian Government to strengthen efforts to address poverty and inequality domestically.

¹¹ United Nations Population Division (2019), *World Population Prospects 2019*. File POP/7-1: Total population (both sexes combined) by five-year age group, region, subregion and country, 1950-2100 (thousands). View at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>

¹² Wilson, C., (2020) ‘Demanding The Future: Navigating The Pacific’s Youth Bulge’ The Lowy Institute,. View at: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/demanding-future-navigating-pacific-youth-bulge#_ftn1

¹³ World Vision (2020). NextGen Aid: Report Card on Children and Australian Aid. View at: https://www.worldvision.com.au/docs/default-source/publications/children/world-vision-nextgen-aid-report-card-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=2ab1b63c_2#:~:text=World%20Vision%20calls%20on%20the,the%20right%20thing%20to%20do.

According to a 2022 study by Curtin University, 3 million Australians live under the poverty line. Nearly 1 million Australians or 5.8% of the total population are living in severe income poverty. Among this cohort, 750,000 children live in severe income poverty and are facing a future of hardship.¹⁴

Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, argues that we need to adopt a focused approach to multi-dimensional child poverty that considers:

- material poverty (insufficient money and material resources to meet basic needs)
- opportunity poverty (barriers to participating in activities that promote learning and inclusion)
- relational poverty (the existence of structural factors that undermine strong and supportive relationships).¹⁵

Strengthened social protection measures during the COVID19 pandemic demonstrated the importance and value of targeted ongoing measures for Australia's poorest families. However, these measures need to be adopted as part of a more strategic approach to defining, measuring and addressing poverty across Australia, including child poverty.

Recommendation One

That the Australian Government:

- Dedicate resources to the development and implementation of a national child poverty strategy to improve the lives and life chances of vulnerable children in Australia.
- Resource the establishment of a dedicated unit within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to design, implement and monitor a child and youth strategy.
- Establish a children's desk within DFAT to gather and refer critical information, draft Ministerial updates, liaise with Ambassadors and provide advice as required.

¹⁴ See: <https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2022/03/BCEC-Poverty-and-Disadvantage-Report-March-2022-FINAL-WEB.pdf>

¹⁵ Bessell, S. (2021). Rethinking Child Poverty. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 1-23.

Ending Violence Against Children

Every child and young person has the right to live a life free from any form of violence, and to grow up in a safe, nurturing and enabling environment where they can exercise their rights. Yet in Australia's immediate neighbourhood, violence against children is at endemic levels. Levels of physical, emotional, and sexual violence as well as neglect, is exceptionally high, and has worsened during COVID.

In Papua New Guinea alone:

- 75% of the child population experience violent discipline
- 70% of children aged 6 to 8 years reported feeling 'scared and in pain' in their community
- 50% of sexual violence cases referred to Médecins Sans Frontières

A 2021 report by ChildFund and its partners, *Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment In Ending Violence Against Children In The Pacific and Timor-Leste* found abuse occurring at the home and community levels, in schools, in religious institutions and in or near industrial areas and large resource and infrastructure projects (such as logging or mining sites).

While the Australian government highlights the need to address EVAC approaches in aid investment plans for countries like PNG, aid budgets lack a deliberate focus on child-focused prevention and programming initiatives aimed at ending all forms of violence against children. This is a significant gap that needs to be addressed to ensure that investments in education and health are not undermined due to the exponential negative physical, psychological and social impact of violence against children (VAC). A failure to take meaningful action against VAC also significantly decreases the likelihood of reaching the 2030 SDG goals.

Violence perpetrated against children is a fundamental human rights violation and often has a lifelong impact on their physical, cognitive and social development. In many instances, children who are victims of violence experience poor health outcomes, impaired cognitive development and increased financial vulnerability, and also display anti-social and aggressive behaviour, continuing the cycle of violence into the next generation

Meanwhile, the international community has clearly recognised the importance of ending violence against children. Globally the SDG have forged a roadmap for global development efforts, of which Australia has endorsed the 2030 Agenda. While non-binding the intention is for it to be highly influential¹⁶, and of specific note is SDG target 16.2. In order to end violence against children, as per Target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), it is imperative for governments to allocate additional resources for prevention and response protection measures and service provision.

Further unpinning the importance of this work is the World Health Organisation's initiative *Inspire: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*, which identifies a select group of strategies that have shown success in reducing violence against children. These include implementation and enforcement of laws; norms and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic strengthening; response and support services; and education and life skills.

In Australia, the incidence of violence against children in institutional settings and at home remains high as evidenced by numerous inquiries and reviews. While there has been a long-term national

¹⁶ DFAT, Sustainable Development Goals < <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/2030-agenda/Pages/sustainable-developmentgoals.aspx>>

plan¹⁷ in place it has lacked greater policy coherence, adequate resourcing and consultation with women and children experiencing violence, and measurement. The most recent iteration of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2022-2032)* has been similarly criticised by key sector actors for failing to:

- address the social, economic, political and cultural drivers of violence
- seek to eliminate the barriers to help seeking behaviour and recovery
- utilise the legislative and policy mechanisms available to the Federal Government that would improve the safety of women and children and eliminate gender-based violence
- commit long term investment in primary prevention of gender-based violence

Recommendation 2:

ChildFund Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Make a formal public commitment to becoming an End Violence Pathfinding Country and commit resources to galvanise action including the appointment of a senior official focal point, and collecting, organizing and analysing disaggregated data on violence against children (VAC).
- Commit resources to supporting other Pathfinding countries across the region to build integrated responses to VAC, in particular PNG.
- Publicly release budget data on the percentage spend on EVAC and EVAW initiatives as percentage of ODA.

Keep children and young people safe online

One of the key defining features of the last decade has been the rise of digital environments and technologies. It is estimated that 1 in 3 internet users is a child (under the age of 18), and that of young people (aged 15 – 24) 71% are online, compared with 48% of the total population.¹⁸ This number is even higher in the global South, with numbers set to increase.¹⁹ The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified this trend, rapidly moving many parts of children’s daily lives online. Our economy and our community have moved online, and the way we work, learn, play exercise, communicate, shop and even meet new people is in a digital environment. It is clear that that there are positive impacts for children and young people in digital environments and is in fact a ‘game changer’ in many regards, just as it is clear that digital technology makes children more susceptible to harm both offline and online, with children who are already vulnerable at much greater risk of harm.²⁰

It is apparent is that the ‘scale severity and complexity of online CSEA [Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse] is increasing at a faster rate than those aiming to tackle the activity can respond...’ requiring

¹⁷ See: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/womens-safety/national-plan-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022>

¹⁸ UNICEF (2019) Growing up in a connected world. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

¹⁹ Livingstone S., Carr J., and Byrne J. (2015) One in Three: internet Governance and Children’s Rights. Report no. 2016-01 |, January 2016. Florence | : UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

²⁰ Western Sydney University. 2021. Our rights in the digital world: a report on children’s consultations to inform UNCRC General Comment 25. View at:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1845497/Our_Rights_in_a_Digital_World_-_Full_Report.pdf

a ‘urgent need for governments, law enforcement organisations, the technology industry and third sector organisations to work together to step up their collective response.’²¹

Within the region the picture on online sexual exploitation and abuse for children and young people is emerging. Data from the ‘Disrupting Harm’ research project demonstrates that at least in South-East Asia, there is clear and present danger. It is worth noting that such experiences are inevitably under-reported, so the proportion of children experiencing harm is likely higher.

Estimated proportions of internet-using children aged 12–17 who experienced at least one form of clear online sexual exploitation and abuse within the year prior to being surveyed.					
Country	Total	Boys	Girls	12-14	15-17
Philippines	20.2%	21.8%	19%	18.2%	22%
Cambodia	11.4%	13.4%	9.2%	14.4%	8.5%
Thailand	9.2%	8.7%	9.5%	10.3%	8.2%
Malaysia	4%	3.9%	4%	3.7%	4.2%
Indonesia	2.2%	2.1%	2.3%	2.4%	2.1%
Vietnam	0.7%	0.5%	0.9%	0.8%	0.6%

(Source: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022). [Children’s experiences of online sexual exploitation and abuse in 12 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia](#). Disrupting Harm Data Insight 1. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children)

Data in the Pacific is less clear. Given the obscure nature of online violence in the Pacific, Australia could play a role in supporting Pacific nations to be counted and be visible at the table. This is a recognised and key issue as identified by Pacific civil society, who in 2019 declared “There is also a growing increase in cyberviolence throughout the Pacific and current data shows that once again women and girls make up the majority of the victims to this type of violence. This new form of violence is compounded by multiple factors and is harder to manage in times of conflict and in during climate crisis.”²²

Even with patchy data, what we do know suggests the risks remain significant.

“No nation, regardless of how they are ranked, has cause for complacency. What we are witnessing is a global cyber-pandemic with high exposure to multiple forms of online risks threatening children across all the countries we surveyed.”

-Yuhyun Park, DQ Institute

In Australia’s immediate region high-speed digital connectivity across the region is set to rapidly expand, with the upgrade of the submarine, fibre optic cable system networking key islands in the Pacific. This will provide children and young people with unprecedented opportunities, but also increases the real risk of harm, particularly given the region already experiences alarmingly high rates of violence against children.²³ Research commissioned by ChildFund Australia and its partners shown that first time (and often mobile first) child users are ill-prepared to deal with online safety risks, and that there are key gaps in policy and legislation, training of frontline support workers, and

²¹ WePROTECT Global Alliance (2019). Global Threat Assessment 2019: Working together to end the sexual exploitation of children online. View at: <https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/Global%20Threat%20Assessment%202019.pdf>

²² Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2019). *2019 Civil Society Dialogue with Pacific Islands Forum Leaders*. Funafuti, Tuvalu 14 August 2019. Retrieved <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-PIF-Dialogue-with-Civil-Society-Organisations.pdf>

²³ UNICEF (2019) Growing up in a connected world. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

the online safety skills and knowledge of parents and /or carers.²⁴ This is further supported from numerous sources, for example one 2019 study found that hundreds of countries have legislation around sexual exploitation, but far fewer have concrete definitions, encompass digitally-mediated versions of it, or offer tools and programmes to combat it.²⁵ Online safety in the region is thus at a critical juncture.

ChildFund Australia recognises the leadership of the Australian Government to establish the E-Safety Commissioner and their partnership with the Fiji Online Safety Commission, as well as the Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program. We further welcome the role that the Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have had in facilitating rapid access to the Pacific and Solomon Islands through the Coral Sea Cable initiative, as we know that this will provide a plethora of opportunity to children and young people. Yet such a role should bear a duty to both understand and take some steps towards addressing the human and social impact of infrastructure development – a more balanced investment. There is a danger that our region will receive an instantaneous digital connection without the time to develop their educational and support services, law enforcement and regulatory response. As stated by the WeProtect Alliance ‘The chain of response is only as strong as its weakest link’.²⁶

While there are some initiatives underway, and we encourage the steps already taken by the Australian Government to address these issues, the response within Australia’s development strategy and ODA can be much strengthened.

Digital challenges go beyond traditional approaches, and by their very nature, beyond typical boundaries and borders. These issues of online safety and harm are a shared challenge - a regional challenge - whereby vulnerability in South-East Asia and Pacific nations means vulnerability in Australia. It will require a strong international response through an international fora.

As is asserted by UNICEF “Article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child places an obligation on States parties to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including all forms of online sexual exploitation and abuse. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has also affirmed that States parties should regularly review, update and enforce robust legislative frameworks ‘to protect children from recognised and emerging risks of all forms of violence in the digital environment’ including sexual exploitation and abuse.”²⁷

Yet there is limited investment to a coordinated approach. A coordinated approach could address existing gaps which include:

- skill building young people and their partners (like parents and other significant/responsible adults)

²⁴ Third, A., Lala, G., Moody, L., & Ogun, N. (2020). Online safety in the Pacific: A report on a living lab in Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. ChildFund Australia, Plan International Australia and Western Sydney University, Sydney

²⁵ WePROTECT Global Alliance (2019). Global Threat Assessment 2019: Working together to end the sexual exploitation of children online. View at: <https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/Global%20Threat%20Assessment%202019.pdf>

²⁶ WePROTECT Global Alliance (2019). Global Threat Assessment 2019: Working together to end the sexual exploitation of children online. View at: <https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/Global%20Threat%20Assessment%202019.pdf>

²⁷ United Nations Children’s Fund (2022) ‘[Legislating for the digital age: Global guide on improving legislative frameworks to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse](#)’ UNICEF, New York

- gaps in knowledge of what online harm looks like in reality and the legislation to support those who have been harmed
- gaps in the right legislation in the right places across multiple countries specific to children’s experiences of harm and including legislation in relation to data pooling, data protection, data mining, as recipients of targeted advertising
- judicial knowledge and recognition that violence can be experienced online
- services to support victim survivors

Strengthening online safety, then, is not just a “technology issue,” but requires a holistic or ecological approach that includes strong legal frameworks, quality education programmes, social infrastructure, industry and civic engagement, and other initiatives – with children and young people at the centre.

While Australia has been a global leader in online safety, the domestic focus has been heavily on strengthening the legal and regulatory environment. There is a critical gap in providing quality curriculum and practical and engaging tools to teach children and young people how to navigate online safety and grow into good digital citizens.

Recommendation 3

ChildFund Australia recommends the Australian Government:

- Resource the design and implementation of a domestic digital inclusion strategy to ensure that all individuals and communities, including those most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies across Australia.
- Maintain current funding commitments to DFAT’s Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program to strengthen online safety across the region.
- Resource the development of bespoke tools/apps to educate children and young people in Australia and across the region on the core competencies to stay safe online.
- Resource comprehensive data collection on Pacific children and young people’s experiences online to inform policy, program investment and prevention strategies.

Disaster Proofing Education in the Pacific

Education is a fundamental part of achieve sustainable human and economic development, and is, in and of itself, a human right as enshrined in multiple human rights treaties including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).²⁸ The nexus between education and disasters and emergencies is critical and has never been more important. Each and every single year disasters and emergencies have a major impact on children and young people and every single year their right to safety and survival, protection, development and participation are under threat. But there are multiple ways in which threats to life and major disruptions to education can be much improved and many ways in which Australia can assure its partners – particularly those in the Indo-Pacific – that Australia is committed to real action on climate change, including its impact on children and young people in education.

Disasters and emergencies, including extreme weather events, are increasingly putting children’s right to education at risk through severe and repeat disruption to education services and through physical collapse and destruction of education infrastructure – which has killed tens of thousands of children.²⁹

Paradoxically, education also drives climate resilience, with one report finding that “...200,000 climate disaster–related deaths could be averted in the following two decades through improved risk awareness if every child received a full secondary school education by 2030.”³⁰

The impact of disrupted education is severe. Aside from the very real risk to life and survival, evidence indicates that disrupted education is linked to increased risk of “depression, anxiety, sleeping disorders, dropping out of school and child trafficking”³¹, not to mention malnutrition.³² As global warming progress, exposure to higher than-average temperatures will impact on learning, as it has been associated with decreased academic performance.³³

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the largest mass disruption to education systems in history, will have a profound effect on learning for an entire generation and is estimated to have affected 90% of the worlds students at the peak in 2020.³⁴ We know the largest impacts were disproportionately felt by children with multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination.³⁵ Some

²⁸ Article 28, Convention on the Rights of the Child. View at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

²⁹ Jiwanji, A., Paci-Green, R., & McFarlane, K. (2020). Comprehensive school safety policy: Trends in the Pacific region. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 35(2), 19-25.

³⁰ Beardmore, S., & Pankhurst, C. (2022). Solving the climate and education crises together. Global Partnership for Education. View at <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/solving-climate-and-education-crises-together>

³¹ Jiwanji, A., Paci-Green, R., & McFarlane, K. (2020). Comprehensive school safety policy: Trends in the Pacific region. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 35(2), 19-25.

³² ³² United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2021) UNDRR ROAMC: Investment in education creates more resilient societies. View at: <https://www.undrr.org/news/undrr-roamc-investment-education-creates-more-resilient-societies>

³³ Jisung Park, R., et al (2020) Heat and Learning. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*. Vol. 12, No. 2

³⁴ United Nations General Assembly (2021). *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Report of the Secretary-General*. A/76/305. View at; <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/167/03/PDF/N2116703.pdf?OpenElement>

³⁵ UNICEF (2020). *COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures?* Fact sheet. UNICEF, New York.

estimated that this will equate to an approximate GDP loss of 1.5% over the remainder of the century.³⁶

During the pandemic it has also become clear how important resilient education systems are to the broader functioning of communities.

An excerpt from the 2021 report to the United Nations General Assembly on the status of the rights of children demonstrates the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on children and their education:

“In 2019, about 500 million children lived in areas with an extremely high risk of flooding owing to extreme weather events and rising sea levels, and nearly 160 million children lived in areas of extreme or high risk of drought. A projected one in four children will live in areas of extreme water stress globally by the year 2040. Research suggests that climate-induced mobility will result in a huge remapping of the world’s populations as millions of children and their families become uprooted. 57 Countries affected by fragility and conflicts are the least prepared to mitigate the risks associated with impacts of climate change, leaving their populations in the most vulnerable.”³⁷

It must be noted that the Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world, as it is 25 times more likely to be affected by disasters than Europe of North America.³⁸

We have some evidence of where change can be had. In the Pacific region, a gap analysis of policies related to comprehensive school safety found that “...poor integration of disaster management and education policies, a failing to address comprehensive school safety responsibilities, a lack of targets and indicators and resource scarcity” were ongoing challenges.³⁹ The policies were mapped against the Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) Framework, introduced and endorsed by the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organization,⁴⁰ three pillars:

- Safe Learning Facilities
- School Disaster Management
- Risk Reduction and Resilience Education

This was also noted in a review conducted by the Global Partnership for Education, stating “The low priority that education receives in disaster planning exposes education systems and children to disasters. The analysis indicates that natural disasters and conflict affected an estimated 84.6 million

³⁶ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2021) UNDRR ROAMC: Investment in education creates more resilient societies. View at: <https://www.undrr.org/news/undrr-roamc-investment-education-creates-more-resilient-societies>

³⁷ United Nations General Assembly (2021). *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Report of the Secretary-General*. A/76/305. View at; <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/167/03/PDF/N2116703.pdf?OpenElement>

³⁸ Ireland, S (2016). Education Disrupted: Disaster impacts on education in the Asia Pacific region in 2015. View at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/education-disrupted-disaster-impacts-education-asia-pacific-region-2015>

³⁹ Jiwanji, A., Paci-Green, R., & McFarlane, K. (2020). Comprehensive school safety policy: Trends in the Pacific region. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Vol. 35. No. 2. Pp.19-25.

⁴⁰ Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),(2016). Common framework for comprehensive school safety. Association of South East Nations. View at: <https://aseansafeschoolsinitiative.org/aseancommon-framework-for-comprehensive-school-safety-2/>.

children on average annually between 2000 and 2016⁴¹ and receive only 2.4% of humanitarian funding to recover.

Strengthening the resilience of communities can mean that children’s right to life and education is much better preserved. Stronger schools mean stronger communities, and vice versa. Investment in DRM has a multiplying effect – education means safe places to learn and play with access to a full range of services and support prevents and reduces impact of risks that occur during disasters – like violence, sexual assault and exploitation and child labor and malnutrition.⁴²

Supporting education not just after a disaster, but before and during is therefore of incredible importance. Short term funding that is largely grants based has led to disjointed outcomes that suffer from a lack of continuation or long-term planning. This means that it’s hard to retain staff and capacity to drive safe and secure schools that are disaster proof. As we learnt during the pandemic, disruption to school, and all the safety and preventative measures it provides, puts children at risk – and not just their education.

Investment in pre-planning and disaster risk reduction can lead to better coordinated and coherent responses to education disruptions and reduce danger to children in school and out of school in disasters and emergencies.

Recommendation 4:

ChildFund Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Resource education resilience curricula to complement investment in safe school infrastructure across the Pacific
- Dedicate targeted resources to integrating education and mentoring into humanitarian responses under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership Program

⁴¹ Global Partnership for Education (2017). Risk Reduction and Risk Finance for Education. BOD/2017/12 DOC 05 Meeting of the Board of Directors December 5– 7, 2017. View at: <https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fs-public/bod-2017-12-doc05-riskreductionandriskfinanceforeducation.pdf?VersionId=MzA89Whp1zn1A.VZephz79daYrl2T.Xk>

⁴² Ireland, S (2016). Education Disrupted: Disaster impacts on education in the Asia Pacific region in 2015. retrieved <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/education-disrupted-disaster-impacts-education-asia-pacific-region-2015>

Health Security

Improve Access to COVID-19 Vaccinations

ChildFund Australia recognizes commitments by the former Government to fund the second phase of the Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific.⁴³

Without a doubt COVID-19 has a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people globally, but not equally. The Committee on the Rights of the Child in early 2020 expressed concern about the physical, emotional, and psychological impact on children, particularly children living in poverty, with disability for whom would have felt the impacts disproportionately.

As highlighted in the ChildFund Alliance recent report *Forward Strong: Ensuring children remained safe, healthy, and able to learn during the COVID-19 pandemic*, the crisis has risked the rights of children in many domains. At least a third of the world's children have been unable to access remote learning, with at least 80 million living in the East Asia Pacific region.⁴⁴ As schools closed, so to did children's access to safe places. Close confinement, uncertain economic conditions and loss of income on one hand undermined parent's ability to provide nutritious food and support, and on the other increased risks to children including gender-based violence and abuse, child labor, early marriage and sexual exploitation. Illness and death resulted in countless children without parental care. Disruptions to prevention and response mechanisms that protect children was significant. COVID-19 has clearly reversed some of the gains made and exposed gaps and exacerbated inequality. In our own programming, it was noted that COVID-19 has indirectly impacted the health and nutrition status of women and children across the world, creating changes to food and healthcare access, like Tuberculosis immunisation and maternal health services.

As it was understood that children are at relatively low risk of mortality and severe morbidity from COVID-19, they were oft overlooked in pandemic responses. While *Partnerships for Recovery* was a welcomed development and a solid start, it did not go far in addressing the indirect effects of COVID-19 on child survival and well-being, including overburdened health systems, and disruptions to life-saving health and protection services.

We urge a holistic approach that better integrates the experiences of children and young people in the next phase of pandemic recovery. As stated in a United Nations *Comprehensive Study on the Impact of COVID-19 on the Least Developed Country Category*, it is important to ensure that "...pandemic control does not only aim at containing the spread of the disease but also at managing the socioeconomic crisis and rising inequality", as in many of the least developed countries, the socioeconomic fallout has been more devastating than the health shock.⁴⁵

ChildFund Australia supports the goal that everyone, everywhere should have access to a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccination. The pandemic has posed significant harm to children and young people both directly and indirectly, and that achieving vaccination goals in low-income countries is critical to the health and security of us all – especially children and young people.

⁴³ See: <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/strategic-investment-our-regions-health-security>

⁴⁴ UNICEF Australia (2020) *At least a third of the world's schoolchildren unable to access remote learning during COVID-19 school closures*. Media Release

⁴⁵ United Nations Committee for Development Policy (2021) *Comprehensive Study on the Impact of COVID-19 on the Least Developed Country Category*. View at: [CDP Comprehensive Study 2021.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

Analysis by UN Development Programme (UNDP) showed that of 10 billion doses given out worldwide, just 1% have been administered in low-income countries. Vaccine inequity risks prolonging the pandemic in the region and delaying recovery. And as at June 29th, cases are on the rise in some 110 countries – amounting to a 20% spike overall. The Lancet medical journal describes current challenges to achieving greater vaccine access as wavering political commitment and disinformation.⁴⁶ These are not insurmountable issue but require concerted action.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has set a target of 70% of the world vaccinated by the end of 2022. And while cases are on the rise around the world again, vaccination rates in Australia's immediate region are not yet high enough. In PNG, the percentage of the population who are fully vaccinated is lower than 4%. Solomon Islands are at 27%, Vanuatu stands at 42% with Kiribati and Tuvalu at 52% and 53% respectively.⁴⁷ A recent evaluation of ChildFund Australia's health programming effectiveness confirmed that widespread misinformation around COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccination is likely to continue to challenge health response activities and there are still many places where misinformation through social media is both prevalent and influential. This, together with stigma attached to contracting the virus has created barriers to both the uptake of COVID-19 prevention messaging and vaccination promotion.

Promoting the right messages through the right channels is key. Research conducted by the World Bank in PNG demonstrated hesitancy can be addressed with clear information about vaccine safety, the dangers of COVID-19 communicated by local health workers, as opposed to distant 'experts'.⁴⁸ Our own evaluations support this finding – positive relationships between ChildFund Australia, partner organisations and communities were critical, and allowed ChildFund to extend awareness-raising activities beyond the official District COVID-19 Task Forces. It is clear that ChildFund and other NGOs have existing work and programmes that can be leveraged.

To maximise the effectiveness of the significant contribution already made by the Australian Government of more than \$900 million since 2020 on international vaccine procurement largely, it should scale up programs and approaches that establish awareness, trust and confidence in vaccines.

Recommendation 5

ChildFund Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Extend funding for the Vaccine Access and Health Security Initiative (VAHSI) to 2025-26 under the second phase of the Indo-Pacific Region Health Security Initiative
- Invests an additional \$50 million to address vaccine hesitancy through education and awareness campaigns, mobilising community health workers, equipping health professionals with training, and strengthening partnership with community-led organisations in the region.

⁴⁶ United Nations News (2022). COVID-19: BA.4 and BA.5 variants spur 20 per cent rise in cases, *UN News*, 29 June. View at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1121682>

⁴⁷ Holder, J. (2022). Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations Around the World. *The New York Times*, 5 July. View at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>?

⁴⁸ Hoy, C., Wood, T., & Moscoe, E. (2021). Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy: Survey and Experimental Evidence from Papua New Guinea. Policy Research Working Paper, no. WPS 9837, Impact Evaluation series, COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. View at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/293831636115205584/Addressing-Vaccine-Hesitancy-Survey-and-Experimental-Evidence-from-Papua-New-Guinea>

- Continue financial contributions to the global COVAX facility (\$250 million) and vaccine sharing (20 million vaccines).

Resilient Health Systems

While it is clear that vaccines must be a key strategy to secure the health security across the region, there must be robust health infrastructure to cope with future crisis. It's important to avoid views of the current pandemic as a one-time shock for developing countries requiring special assistance, but as "...evidence of pre-existing vulnerabilities that require more coherent and continuous support."⁴⁹

As a result of the pandemic, key shifts in healthcare service delivery towards pandemic response to combat the grave impact of COVID-19, whilst necessary pivot for many have also resulted in disrupted services more broadly. According to WHO, substantial disruptions persisted in 2021 with about 90% of countries still reporting one or more disruptions to essential health services. Many of these disruptions persist today, and altogether have resulted in:

- Children and young people missing out on primary health care and life-saving emergency care
- Children experiencing the consequences of immunisation disruption and are being vulnerable to measles, Polio and other vaccine preventable illnesses
- ongoing and extensive disruptions to health services for TB, HIV, Malaria and malnutrition, as well as family planning and contraception, as reported by 40% of countries
- All in all, there is considerable setbacks to progress and investments made to achieve SDG 2030

This emphasises the need for preparedness of future health threats while making sure core and essential health services are ready to combat pre-existing fight to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like TB, HIV, Malaria and malnutrition. To achieve this, we need to invest in resilient and sustainable health systems for future threats at the same time as working to restore core services.

Health system strengthening contributes to disaster preparedness by creating structures and resources that can be pivoted in a crisis.

Case Study

In PNG, the ChildFund Australia-supported health program has a strong track record of strengthening TB control programs. Most recently it helped establish a number of TB testing laboratories and coordinate a testing system in Central Province. When COVID-19 pandemic was detected, these testing facilities were pivoted to allow for provincial level COVID-19 testing and greatly strengthened the response in Central Province. Similarly, ChildFund's integrated community health outreach activities that cover the majority of the province became a strong platform from which to incorporate COVID-19 messaging and response activities. This attracted a number of grants from MFAT, DFAT, and USAID⁵⁰, leading to expansion of support to Northern (Oro Province) Province and the development of a strong working partnership with the Clinton Health Access Initiative.

⁴⁹ United Nations Committee for Development Policy (2021) Comprehensive Study on the Impact of COVID-19 on the Least Developed Country Category. View at: [CDP Comprehensive Study 2021.pdf \(un.org\)](#) p. 28

⁵⁰ COVID-19 health response grants total approximately \$774,000 AUD, including the MFAT funded "Emergency Response for Papua New Guinea COVID-19" (\$333,684 NZD, July 2021 - May 2022); DFAT funded "COVID-19 Delivery Services Grant" in partnership with CHAI (\$461,478.26AUD, Jan - Dec 2022). A USAID COVID-19 Technical Assistance grant and second DFAT COVID-19 grant are also in the pipeline.

Critical to this work was engagement with health volunteers in a variety of settings. Engaging and supporting volunteers who are embedded in communities who are most at risk has improved reach and facilitated vital community links to health services. Putting people and communities at the centre of such responses is vital for building trust and engagement with communities, and being an effective means of delivering health knowledge and behaviour change to communities. ChildFund Australia's review is supported more broadly, with one rapid desk-based review on the status of current health systems strengthening in the region pointing community health workers to be the cornerstone of improvements in access to health services.⁵¹

ChildFund Australia notes that September 2022 marks the 7th Replenishment for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. The global fund has been important in the short term to shoring up fragile health systems and adapting systems to fight COVID-19. As stated by the Pacific Friends of Global Health, it also represents exceptional value for money, leveraging \$13 USD for the region for every \$1 USD contributed by the Australian Government.⁵² The dramatic changes in the landscape of global health has warranted a shift the Global Fund's strategy to resource adaptation and contribute to pandemic preparedness and response. When combined with disruptions to routine immunisations affecting an estimated 80 million children under the age of 1, alongside disrupted newborn, child and maternal health services and HIV/AIDS services⁵³, the case and for a 29% increase on previous replenishments is warranted. Given the dividends on investment, this replenishment is a quality investment, even more so when considering the national and regional impact of global health issues – like a pandemic.

Recommendation 6

ChildFund Australia recommends the Australian Government:

- Contribute \$330 (AUD) million the 7th replenishment of The Global Fund to raise USD \$18 billion in order to get the world back on track toward ending HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria and to build resilient, equitable, and sustainable systems.
- Ear mark funding for pilot programs to strengthen regional health systems in priority countries such as PNG (for example, adapting Village Health Volunteer model to reduce the burden of main healthcare system) which doubles in impact in its contribution to Disaster Risk Management outcomes.

⁵¹ Linhart C, Craig A, Rosewell A, Beek K, Pardosi J.(2022) Investing in our future: Building strong and resilient health systems in the Indo-Pacific region. UNSW Sydney, The Fred Hollows Foundation, Australian Council for International Development. View at: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2022-05/apo-nid317699.pdf>

⁵² Pacific Friends of Global Health (2022). 2022-23 Federal Pre-Budget Submission.

⁵³ United Nations General Assembly (2021). *Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Report of the Secretary-General*. A/76/305. View at; <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/167/03/PDF/N2116703.pdf?OpenElement>

Protecting Children in Humanitarian Emergencies

Children and young people are disproportionately impacted by armed conflict, climate change and disasters. They frequently pay the highest price in a context of an increase in the frequency, protracted nature and complexity of such humanitarian crisis. We note the emerging key trends globally:

- Rapidly growing need – 274 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection⁵⁴
- Two billion people live in countries where development outcomes are affected by fragility, conflict, and violence
- Deterioration of humanitarian access in many settings
- Famine and hunger are rising (largest food crisis in a century) creating additional protection concerns for women and girls
- Children remain out of education settings for prolonged periods
- Forced displacement is at record levels
- Hidden, serious health risks driven by climate change

The dynamic of rising conflict, climate change and COVID-19 has created an enormous humanitarian challenge, with the amount of people needing assistance and protection surpassing 2021 figures – which was already the highest figure in decades.

UNICEF estimates that 177.7 million children worldwide will be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022, a combination of the effects of COVID-19, conflict and climate crisis.⁵⁵ Other estimates show 2 in 3 children (1.6 billion) live in conflict affected country, with 1 in 6 (452 million children) living in or within 50 km of a conflict zone.⁵⁶

Increasingly children are directly targeted in conflicts – used as human shields, killed and maimed and recruited to fight, are victims of gender-based violence and are abducted, with schools and hospitals directly targeted.⁵⁷ Last year, the United Nations verified a total of 23,946 grave violations – which are heavily gendered - against children in conflict or 72 violations a day.⁵⁸

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs unequivocally points to climate change as a root cause of famine, joining conflict. The Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 states “...the climate crisis presents an immediate existential threat to the lives and livelihoods of many. In 2020, extreme climatic and weather events drove almost 16 million people into food crises

⁵⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2022). Global Humanitarian Overview 2022. View at: <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Global%20Humanitarian%20Overview%202022.pdf>

⁵⁵ UNICEF (2022) Prospects for children in 2022: A Global Outlook. View at: <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/2471/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-Prospects-for-Children-Global-Outlook-2022.pdf>

⁵⁶ Kamøy, K., Podieh, P., Salarkia, K., (2021) Stop the War on Children: A crisis of recruitment. Save the Children. View at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/SWOC-5-5th-pp.pdf/>

⁵⁷ UNICEF (2018) *World has failed to protect children in conflict in 2018*. Media Release. UNICEF, New York, 27 December. View at: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/world-has-failed-protect-children-conflict-2018-unicef>

⁵⁸ UNICEF, (2022). UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2022: Overview. View at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/humanitarian-action-children-2022-overview>

in 15 countries. And food crises in turn fuel further violence and exploitation of women and children.⁵⁹

As stated by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the highest humanitarian need remains the Middle East and Africa – both of which are important to Australia’s conflict prevention and humanitarian objectives under the 2017 White Paper.⁶⁰

At the same time our region is the most disaster-prone regions in the world. The Asia-Pacific is 25 times more likely to be affected by disasters than Europe or North America.

ChildFund Australia supports a regional neighbourhood approach to humanitarian investment with global touchpoints where there is overwhelming program criticality and scale such as in Afghanistan or Ukraine.

Recommendation 7

ChildFund Australia recommends the Australian Government:

- Increase total investment in humanitarian aid in response to intensified need and complexity, proportionate to need in multiple and protracted emergencies.

Food security and fighting famine

In 2022 there is a crisis of new proportions where conflict – including the war in Ukraine - COVID-19 and climate shocks have doubled the number of people living with life-threatening hunger. Right now there are 49 million people who are facing famine. This immediate food crisis will hit children first and hardest. We know that:

- Almost 8 million children under 5 are at risk of death from severe wasting unless they receive immediate therapeutic food and care – with the number rising by the minute
- In the world’s hungriest countries, children too young to walk are surviving on less than one meal a day
- Girls are often the first to be taken out of school and the last to eat when food runs low
- Life-threatening hunger also places girls at risk of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and unwanted pregnancy

Recommendation 8

ChildFund Australia further supports ACFID’s Budget Submission, and their recommendations to:⁶¹

- Deliver a Global Food Security Strategy that provides urgent hunger relief and averts famine, including
 - an immediate response for urgent famine prevention of \$150 million in critical hunger hotspots: Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and the Horn of Africa.
 - Support for global efforts to address the root causes of food insecurity by investing \$200 million annually over 3 years initially in prevention and resilience.

⁵⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2022). Global Humanitarian Overview 2022. View at: <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Global%20Humanitarian%20Overview%202022.pdf>

⁶⁰ ACFID (n.d) Policy Brief: Humanitarian Action for Those in Greatest Need. View at: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/Election%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20Humanitarian%20Action_V4.pdf

⁶¹ ACFID Pre-Budget Submission, (2022) A New Era in Australia’s Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, unpublished, 18 July.

- Appointment of a Food Security Special Envoy to champion the food security agenda and to lead Australia's international engagement.

Life-saving interventions for children in emergencies

In times of crisis, children and young people face increased risk of all forms of violence and exploitation. They are at risk of injury and disability, physical and sexual violence, and psychosocial distress. They may be separated from their families, recruited into armed forces or groups, economically exploited or come into contact with the justice system. Experience repeatedly shows that timely interventions to protect children in emergencies save lives, now and later.

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The DFAT Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) has been a mainstay in the Humanitarian landscape, of which ChildFund Australia is a proud partner. In 2020 ChildFund Australia commissioned a review of Child Protection in Emergencies (CPIE) across AHP activations to understand gaps and opportunities. A significant finding was that across Fiji, Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea there was no consistent understanding of CPIE, and it was often conflated with child-safeguarding. Furthermore, despite the strategic priority of CPIE, there was a disconnect between strategic intent and implementation activities. Activities in country were largely focused on child-safeguarding capacity building and DFAT compliance with limited CPIE activity.

The failure to implement CPIE was found to be driven by a number of issues. These include the absence of a DFAT child and young people strategy and no CPIE specific indicator in the AHP Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework. As a result, there is very little focus nor capacity to protect children in emergencies.

Extensive recommendations were made in the report, which could improve lifesaving interventions for children and young people in the region. But to date and to the best of our knowledge, none of the recommendations have been addressed.

Recommendation 9

ChildFund Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Dedicate targeted resources to strengthen Child Protection in Emergencies practice and programming under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership.

Improving an approach to Disaster Risk Management

"We in the Pacific do not want to stand by and wait for the next disaster. We want to be able to prepare"

- Acting Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Dr Filimon Manoni, May 2022

Climate change and disaster risk are inherently linked, yet policy and funding mechanisms haven't yet bridged what has historically been divided. The need to respond in a coherent way is has been a consistent message from the Pacific, across multiple fronts. A primary example is the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and*

Disaster Risk Management (FRDP), which outlines the overlaps between climate change adaptation and disaster risk management, and indeed the very first goal of the FRDP is to achieve strengthened integrated adaptation and risk reduction to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters.

The need for this approach has been cemented by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, who outline “Risk-centred approaches should be integrated into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and adaptation and climate information into national and local disaster risk reduction strategies.”⁶²

In a statement just a few months ago, the acting Secretary General of the PIF declared the scarcity of funding available to this end, saying “While there are several disaster risk financing options available, most are only triggered after a catastrophic event, and focuses on post-disaster response, relief and recovery.”⁶³

While DFAT’s 2016 Humanitarian Strategy also held a commitment to strengthen alignment between the Department’s DRR and Climate Change Adaptation work, it’s difficult to see the impact.

ChildFund Australia and its partners experience is that this work remains siloed, as different sectors can’t access the funding from one to the other resulting in a weakened response across the board. There is a need to achieve greater policy coherence between Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction that has impact for those most marginalised and excluded including children and young people, and brings together technical advice and the workforce to provide it, while reducing the barriers to funding.

On the ground this results in project-based funding that doesn’t allow for continuity from one project to the next. This undermines the ability of communities to build and grow expertise through maintaining core staff to prepare and adapt – not just respond.

Recommendation 10

ChildFund Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Adopt a whole of government approach to prevention and risk reduction across its domestic policy and its international aid and development policy.
- Consider options to develop a prevention fund to resource local prevention programs across Australia and the Pacific, including for First Nations peoples and youth leaders.

⁶²United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, (n.d) Climate Action and Disaster Risk Reduction. View at: <https://www.undrr.org/climate-action-and-disaster-risk-reduction>

⁶³ See the full statement here: <https://www.forumsec.org/2022/05/03/remarks-asg-dr-filimon-manoni-at-the-pacific-disaster-risk-finance-symposium/>

Protect children in armed conflict – Myanmar

The military coup by Myanmar’s military has resulted in disaster for children and young people. Grave violations⁶⁴ of children’s rights continue to be reported. Targeted attacks on children have been described by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar as “relentless”⁶⁵. UNICEF estimates there are 14.4 million people, including 5 million children, in need of humanitarian assistance.⁶⁶ The true extent of grave violations is likely much greater, as a system to monitor human rights abuses have been significantly disrupted.

It is currently reported by UNICEF, and in country sources, that:⁶⁷

- about 260 schools and other educational buildings have been attacked since the coup
- Over 400 children who have been directly killed or maimed by the military and its allies
- 1,400 children have been arbitrarily detained, with at least 61 being held hostage by the military and its allies
- 250,000 children have been displaced, joining 130,000 children in protracted displacement with more than 500,000 child refugees from Myanmar already in neighbouring countries
- 33,00 children could die preventable deaths in 2022 alone, due to disruptions to routine vaccines
- 1.3 million children and 700,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women require nutritional support
- 7.8 million children are out of school

As at July 2022, only 12% of \$826 million 2022 Myanmar Humanitarian response plan has been committed, of which Australia has pledged \$8.2 million (USD).⁶⁸ A further \$5 million was committed to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management. In comparison, Australia has committed 38.6 million (USD) to the 2022 Afghanistan humanitarian response plan. ChildFund Australia recognised the overall contribution of the Australian Government in official development assistance, accounting for close to \$100 million AUD per annum, while at the same time recognising the urgent humanitarian need is escalating.

Per data from OCHA, Australian humanitarian commitments in 2022 are at a decade low, and much lower than its own 2017 White Paper commitment to provide \$500 million per annum in humanitarian funding.

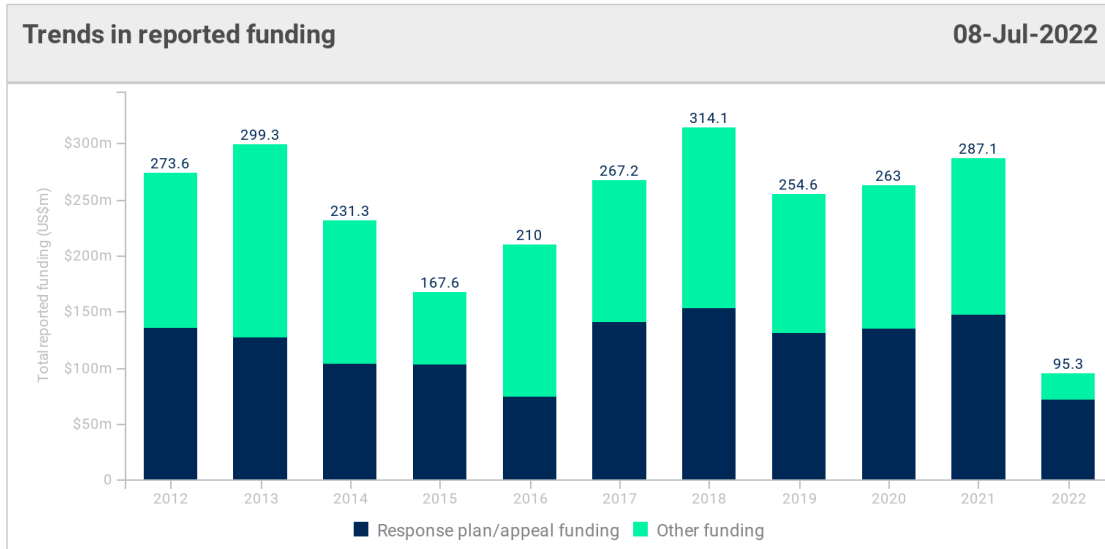
⁶⁴ The six grave violations are: Killing and maiming of children; Recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups; Sexual violence against children; Attacks against schools or hospitals; Abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access for children. (Source: <https://www.unicef.org/stories/children-under-attack-six-grave-violations-against-children-times-war>)

⁶⁵ Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (2022) *Losing a generation: how the military junta is devastating Myanmar’s children and undermining Myanmar’s future*. Conference room paper of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Human Rights Council, Fiftieth Session, A/HRC/50/CRP.1 , 14 June

⁶⁶ UNICEF, (2022). UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2022: Overview. View at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/humanitarian-action-children-2022-overview>

⁶⁷ Email correspondence, in-country child focused NGO, July 4th 2022; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (2022) *Losing a generation: how the military junta is devastating Myanmar’s children and undermining Myanmar’s future*. Conference room paper of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Human Rights Council, Fiftieth Session, A/HRC/50/CRP.1 , 14 June

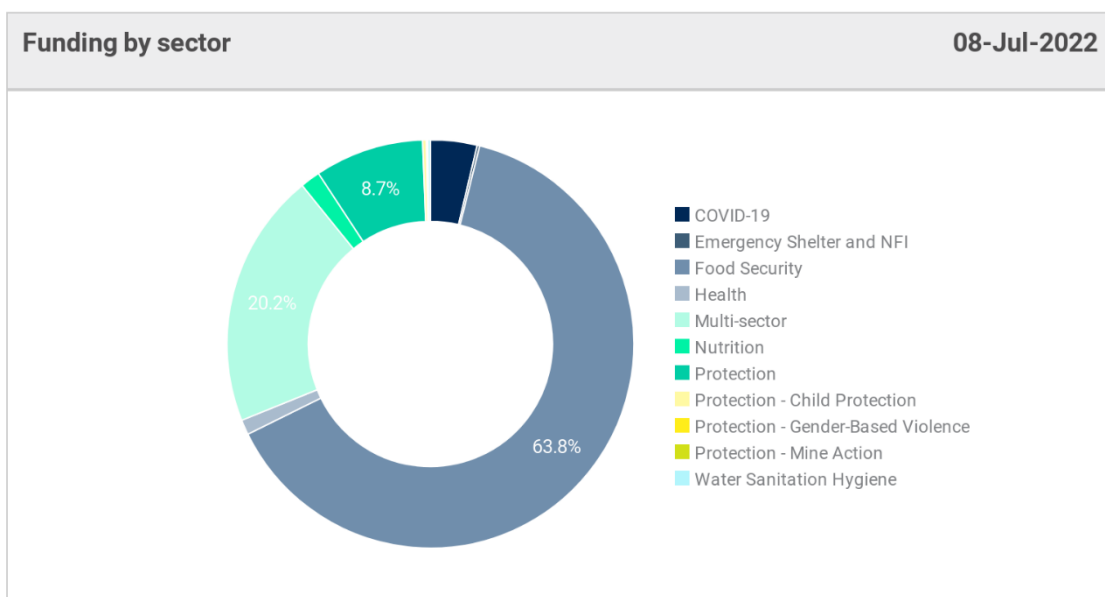
⁶⁸OCHA Services (2022). Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022. View at: <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1095/summary>



Total reported funding in the latest year shown (far right bar) represents funding reported for the year to date.

(Source: Financial Tracking Service OCHA, Donor Summary, *Australia, Government of 2022* retrieved <https://fts.unocha.org/donors/4391/summary/2022>)

Further, very little funding is dedicated to child protection or gender-based violence in 2022.



(Source: Financial Tracking Service OCHA, Donor Summary, *Australia, Government of 2022* retrieved <https://fts.unocha.org/donors/4391/summary/2022>)

Funding provided through the Humanitarian assistance program has largely focused on food security and nutrition.

This overall picture underpins what on-the-ground evidence is mounting in Myanmar – which is a urgent need for humanitarian assistance, and in assistance in life saving protection, both of which would appear to be underfunded.

ChildFund Australia is one of a number of Australian INGOs operational in Myanmar who have called for additional funding and identified lifesaving child protection as a core area of humanitarian need. Consensus is that additional funding would enable:

1. Multi-year funding allocations to organisations doing critical work in education and training, child protection and development, women’s rights as well as healthcare.
2. Increased assistance to Southeast Myanmar including a border wide vaccine roll out, and actions to address food insecurity, repeat displacement, lack of shelter and access to health.

In-country sources also indicate that the need for life saving protecting efforts in the Northwest are also escalating.

Recommendation 11

ChildFund Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- increase funding for humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, by providing a further \$16 million (USD) in the 2022-2023 budget update implemented via the Australian Humanitarian Program

We also affirm the broader sector position that the provision of flexible and predictable humanitarian assistance globally, not just in the Indo-Pacific, to countries where need is most acute or under-funded.

Contact

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