

October 15, 2021

Shalanda Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to respectfully urge you to protect and increase investments in children and youth globally through a robust 2023 fiscal year funding request. It is now more urgent than ever before for the President's Budget Request to reflect the multifaceted needs of children and youth and propose robust funding.

While the programs and advocacy priorities of our organizations are varied, we have signed on in support of this letter to draw greater attention to the need for a whole-of-government response that better links separate issue areas and appropriations accounts to better address the multifaceted challenges facing children and young people and supports their voices in creating sustainable solutions. Children and youth worldwide are facing increased violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, food insecurity, learning loss, and/or the losses of primary caregivers due to COVID-19.

- Sadly, [millions of children have already lost a mother, father or other primary caregiver](#) due to COVID-19 and with greater loss expected, based on CDC research.
- According to UNICEF, 1.8 billion children live in 104 countries where violence prevention and response services have now been disrupted due to COVID-19; and [6,000 children under 5 could die a day](#)—more than four per minute.
- An estimated 356 million children, [1 in 6 children globally, lived in extreme poverty](#) before the pandemic, and experts predict this has only worsened.
- Approximately 85% of the world's children live in developing countries that will face [the most serious impacts of climate change](#).
- [426 million of the world's children currently live in areas affected by conflict](#), and more than 235 million people – half of them children – will need some form of humanitarian assistance this year, up from 170 million in 2020. That's a dramatic 40 percent increase in less than a year.

Based on current trajectories, the pandemic's impacts are anticipated to set progress on children's issues back by 20 years.

Disaggregating U.S. foreign assistance recipients by age or life stage is not currently possible. That said, there are several Congressional appropriations accounts focused on children and youth or on the issues that most impact children and youth. According to a 2020 First Focus on

Children report, foreign assistance for children and youth is spread between 26 and 30 federal offices, depending on the fiscal year, and [less than 0.11% of federal funds go to children and youth globally](#), leaving enormous gaps in support.

We are eager to see the forthcoming Presidential Budget Request reflect a robust approach that prioritizes children and youth. We collectively serve children and youth in different capacities, and understand the need for holistic, multi-sectoral, and whole-of-government responses to the needs of children and young people, particularly given the disproportionate impacts that both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change have on them. We recognize that the issues affecting young people are interrelated and that backsliding in any one area puts children at risk in other areas. The list below does not reflect the full needs of children and youth, and instead signals the funding recommendations and request levels to protect and increase existing accounts for fiscal year 2023 (FY23).

Basic Education: \$1.125 billion

Basic Education provides children with literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills, and lays the foundation for sustainable economic growth, poverty alleviation, social stability, and participatory democracy. Greater educational attainment also reduces the long term need for foreign aid and bolsters emerging markets for international trade. Studies have shown that each additional year of education can lead to a 10 percent increase in income and if all children left school with basic reading skills there would be a 12 percent reduction in world poverty. The 2019 – 2023 U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education seeks to strengthen education systems in partner countries so that all children have the opportunity to acquire the education and skills needed for a vibrant and successful future.

RECOMMENDATION: We request \$1.125 billion for Basic Education in fiscal year 2023, including funding for bilateral U.S. Government assistance through USAID, other departments and agencies; the Global Partnership for Education (GPE); and the Education Cannot Wait Fund (ECW).

Child Marriage: \$30 million

No less than \$30 million annually for the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive effort to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls. This commitment should be in addition to funding to address the increased needs due to COVID-19 and other ongoing crises, including slow and sudden onset climate-change related emergencies, forced displacement, and protracted conflicts. These funds should include increased commitments to local organizations that are championing girls' rights and an end gender-based violence. Local women's rights and youth rights organizations, including girl-led initiatives, have critical roles to play in preventing child marriage and supporting married girls, including in humanitarian contexts.

Empowering Adolescent Girls: \$250 million

We request \$250,000,000 for the coordination and implementation of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. A 2017 Task Force convened by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which included bipartisan Members of Congress and development

experts, recommended funding these kinds of activities at \$250,000,000 annually. The first-ever strategy of its kind, of any government, the Girl Strategy outlines a comprehensive U.S. government approach to agency-specific responses to educate and empower adolescent girls, as well as mechanisms for inter- and intra-agency coordination to harness the full power of the U.S. government and avoid duplication of efforts.

International Disaster Assistance & Migration and Refugee Assistance:

The needs of children and youth affected by emergencies have reached an unprecedented scale. Today, 426 million of the world's children currently live in areas affected by conflict, and more than 235 million people – half of them children – will need some form of humanitarian assistance this year, up from 170 million in 2020. That's a dramatic 40 percent increase in less than a year. Of the roughly 117.7 million children who need life-saving support in 2021, more than half (60 million) live in just eight countries, with Yemen, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo accounting for more than 10 million children each. The combination of climate-induced drought, COVID-19 and increased conflict has exacerbated already dire situations. Girls face additional risk, with adolescent girls in conflict zones 90 percent more likely to be out of school than girls in non-conflict settings. Sixty percent of preventable maternal deaths take place in settings of conflict, displacement, and natural disaster. Compounding these challenges is that there is a severe global shortfall in funding to address these needs.

Therefore, in addition to sector-specific health and development assistance, we also support robust funding for International Disaster Assistance and Migration and Refugee Assistance to help children in emergencies and displaced children. Recommended funding levels must be sufficient to ensure child-focused interventions, including: access to essential health, nutrition, and WASH services; safe return to learning; protection from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect; mental health and psychosocial support; and increased income opportunities to enable families to meet their basic needs and lessen negative coping mechanisms.

Maternal and Child Health: \$1.012 billion, including \$290 million for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and \$65 million for Polio

Maternal and child health (MCH) funding is among the most cost-effective, life-saving investments the U.S. can make. Increased investment in MCH programs is essential to strengthen health systems, address backsliding due to COVID-19 disruptions to essential health services, and accelerate progress towards meeting 2030 goals. In 2012, the United States launched the Child Survival Call to Action alongside Ethiopia and India, spearheading the global goal of ending preventable child and maternal deaths by 2030. The upcoming 10-year anniversary is an opportunity to reinvigorate global leadership and galvanize other donors with strong investment and a renewal of this commitment.

Investments in the MCH account have lifesaving effects. [Global under-five deaths fell from 12.6 million in 1990 to 5.3 million in 2019, while during the same time period, maternal deaths decreased from 532,000 to 295,000 annually.](#) However, the pandemic has resulted in mothers and children around the world being unable to access lifesaving services like immunization, skilled assistance with delivery, and prenatal and postpartum care— and as a result, preliminary data shows that maternal and child mortality rates around the world are increasing rapidly.

Increased investment to combat these impacts is desperately needed to protect progress made in the last 10 years.

In addition to stemming disruptions due to COVID-19, there are key areas where additional investments are needed to address remaining challenges, including treating and preventing pneumonia, reducing newborn deaths, and addressing long-stagnant rates of maternal mortality. Even before the global pandemic, maintaining the current pace of mortality reduction was not sufficient to achieve shared global goals for maternal and child survival. The “last mile” of progress requires intensified efforts, more targeted investments, and tailored solutions.

MCH funding also fulfills U.S. commitments to the global plan for polio eradication and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to increase access to new and underutilized vaccines for poor countries. Polio cases have decreased by over 99% since 1988, largely thanks to USAID’s collaboration with WHO and other partners to achieve global polio eradication. Through U.S. partnership with Gavi, [more than 822 million children have been vaccinated in the world’s poorest countries, preventing more than 14 million future deaths](#). Investing in routine immunization programs is a global health “best buy,” but the pandemic has resulted in costly disruptions to immunization - [over 23 million children missed out on core vaccinations and of this total, 17 million children received no vaccines at all](#) - referred to as “zero-dose children.” This is the biggest decline in vaccine coverage since 2008, and continued partnership with Gavi is essential for maintaining and restoring routine immunizations.

Nutrition: \$300 million

An investment of at least \$300 million in the Global Health Nutrition account is needed to meet critical nutrition needs around the globe, especially in the context of COVID-19. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, [malnutrition was a leading factor in child deaths, contributing to nearly 3 million child deaths each year](#). Pandemic-related disruptions to global food and health systems are predicted to [double global malnutrition rates](#), particularly for women and children. [By 2022, COVID-19 could result in an additional 17 million severely malnourished children](#). The secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on national economies, health systems, and food security are creating the very real risk that the world will lose decades of nutrition gains, with an increase in preventable deaths and untold lost potential. 2021 is the Nutrition Year of Action, offering critical opportunities for the U.S. to be a leader in addressing global malnutrition by announcing bold new commitments and investments to improve food security and nutrition. Two platforms for U.S. financial and political leadership include the UN Food Systems Summit in September and the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in December. In addition, the upcoming 10-year anniversary of the Child Survival Call to Action in 2022 is an opportunity to reinvigorate global leadership and galvanize other donors in a renewal of commitment to child and maternal survival. Increased investment in global nutrition is critical to reaching the U.S.- spearheaded global goal of ending preventable child and maternal deaths by 2030.

UNICEF: At least \$134 million

Despite the gains made by UNICEF, [every year 5.2 million children under five](#) (nearly 15,000 each day, including 6,700 newborns) die from mostly preventable causes. Malnutrition contributes to nearly half of all child deaths. More than [700 children under five die every day](#)

from diarrhea and other illnesses related to unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation and hygiene. In 2020, due to disruptions in routine immunization services, 23 million children missed out on basic vaccines – *the highest number since 2009*.

UNICEF's long-term presence in 190 countries and territories enables it to reach children and youth in the greatest need and at greatest risk. The U.S. voluntary contribution helps UNICEF continue to provide vaccines to protect 45% of the world's children under age five from deadly diseases, and to partner with the United States in fighting vaccine-preventable diseases in 99 countries, including polio and measles. Additionally, in 2020, UNICEF and partners responded to [455 new and ongoing humanitarian crises in 152 countries](#).

U.S. government support for UNICEF leverages funding from corporations, foundations, and other governments. UNICEF receives no direct funding from the United Nations – all of UNICEF's funds come from voluntary contributions from both public and private sources. Without the U.S. contribution to UNICEF, critical global health and development programs would be put at risk, such as polio eradication, basic education, immunizations, malaria bed nets, pediatric HIV/AIDS interventions, and protecting children from violence and abuse. As such, UNICEF needs a U.S. contribution to its core resources of at least \$134 million in Fiscal Year 2023.

Vulnerable Children: At least \$35 million

The Vulnerable Children account covers implementation of Public Law (PL) 109-95 and supports programs serving the most vulnerable children around the globe. The politically appointed U.S. Government Special Advisor for Children in Adversity, with support from the Office on Children in Adversity team, leads a whole-of-government response to the world's most vulnerable children in alignment with the Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity (APCCA) strategy, launched in 2019. USAID has given particular attention to children who are living outside family care, who are experiencing violence, who have delays or disabilities, and who live in crisis-affected contexts.

Funding of \$35 million for the Vulnerable Children Account would allow the Children in Adversity Office to effectively implement the Global Child Thrive Act, which was enacted on January 1, 2021. The law calls for USAID to integrate early childhood development (ECD) interventions into existing foreign assistance programs serving vulnerable children and their families. Early childhood interventions are simple and cost-effective methods of building the brain architecture of young children and include training caregivers to provide age-appropriate mental stimulation and nurturing care, such as singing and reading.

Over 1.5 million children lost a primary caregiver due to COVID-19 between March 2020 – April 2021. As deaths continue to increase with the spread of the Delta variant, vulnerable children are further at risk as kinship, foster care and domestic adoption are stretched to its limit. There is a critical need to invest in families to ensure that children can remain, return to, or be placed in safe family care. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the risk of children experiencing violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. This level of investment would also

further programming focused on child-safeguarding initiatives, both online and offline, among U.S. government personnel and partners and strengthening social service workforce capacity.

Water and Sanitation: \$600 million

Safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are essential to and amplify other critical work by the U.S. government in global health, economic development, gender equality, food security/nutrition and responding to the climate crisis. WASH is critical to the prevention, response to, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic particularly in many parts of the world where vaccines are still difficult to access; yet, [31% of schools lack access to clean water](#), and 45% of health care facilities do not have basic water services. Further, every day, [more than 1,400 children under 5 die from preventable diarrheal diseases](#), including cholera, caused by contaminated water and poor sanitation. WASH is one of the first lines of defense in slowing the spread of most infectious disease outbreaks such as the flu, diarrhea, coronaviruses, and Ebola, as well as protecting communities, patients, and health workers over the long-term.

In F.Y. 2018-2019, USAID WASH activities in 51 countries helped [11.6 million people](#) gain access to improved water and 10.6 million gain access to improved sanitation. While some progress has been made, 1 in 4, or [2 billion people](#), still live without access to safe drinking water, [1.7 billion people](#) do not have a toilet of their own, and [2.3 billion people still lack basic access to wash their hands](#). Improving global access to WASH would significantly decrease morbidity and mortality, build resilient communities, improve economic productivity, avert backsliding in other U.S. development priorities, and prevent instability and conflict. Notably, as the global climate crisis escalates, climate adaptation and mitigation cannot advance without WASH at their center.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. We know that you face many difficult budget choices and competing priorities. We recommend concerted and whole-of-government coordination and action and note that any increases to the accounts listed above should not come at the expense of other poverty-focused development or humanitarian assistance accounts and welcome the opportunity to discuss the recommendations further.

Signed,

- Advancing Girls' Education in Africa (AGE Africa)
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Basic Education Coalition
- Bethany Christian Services
- CARE
- ChildFund
- Children's HeartLink
- Collective Impact
- CORE Group
- DOUTSEN&R LTD
- Education Development Center (EDC)

- Fight Slavery Now!
- First Focus on Children
- Food for the Hungry
- Friends of Terre des Hommes
- Futures Without Violence
- Global Campaign for Education - US
- Heartland Alliance International
- Humanity & Inclusion
- Milaan Foundation
- Muslim American Leadership Alliance
- Pastoralist Child Foundation
- People Serving Girls At Risk
- Rescue Children and Youth Film Foundation
- RESULTS
- RISE Institute
- Sauti Ya Mtoto
- Save the Children
- Seeds to Sew International
- Shot@Life
- Sunshinegirls
- The Coalition for Adolescent Girls (CAG)
- The Hunger Project
- Together for Girls
- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
- UnCUT/VOICES Press
- UNICEF USA
- WaterAid America
- Women Deliver
- Women's Refugee Commission
- Youth Bridge inc.