



Terre des Hommes
International Federation



Consultations on the scope and elements of the Summit of the Future

Children and their rights at the centre of the Summit of the Future and the negotiations of the Pact for the Future

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The impact of the Summit of the Future and the Pact for the Future on children and their rights

As expressed by both Member States and the Secretary-General, the Summit of the Future (SoF) is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges and address gaps in global governance, boost the implementation of the UN75 commitments and reaffirm commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Charter. The Pact for the Future will reinvigorate the multilateral system translating into positive and direct impact for people's lives.

Given that children amount to over a third of the world's population, all decisions taken before and during the SoF will be the foundation of their present and future, having a long-lasting impact. Although it is clear that they will be the most impacted group, the discussions on the SoF have yet to include the views and opinions of one of the largest group of stakeholders, and deliberations on the different tracks have not yet had children's needs and rights at the core of discussions.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the most widely-ratified human rights treaty, establishes the right of the child to be heard and have their views taken seriously on all matters affecting the child. Children rely on Member States to uphold this right and make it a reality, especially for a Summit that will transform their lives.

As the Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasised, "If the UN is truly committed to become a more inclusive multilateral platform for partnership and solidarity having people at center – as outlined in Our Common Agenda – children cannot be excluded from the process for the Summit of the Future (...). Children should be both subjects of the Summit and the resulting Pact for the Future, and active participants before, during and after the Summit".¹

Differentiating children from youth

Member States, UN agencies, and civil society organisations have placed strong emphasis on future generations and youth participation and committed to opportunities for meaningful youth engagement, which is commendable. This has, nevertheless, shed light on the gap that children are not being considered as key stakeholders in this process.

As set out in the UNCRC, children, all human beings under 18, constitute a group of distinct rights holders under international law and they must be recognised as such. Children should not be subsumed in other, different groups such as "youth" or "future generations". These terms are not

¹ Intervention from Mikiko Otani, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 15 February: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/crc/statements/crc-chair-statement-consultation-summit-future.docx>

defined by international law and describe a separate demographic with different (sometimes overlapping) rights.

As the international community works to strengthen the multilateral system to ensure that youth have the deserved space to contribute to decision-making, the same efforts should be made for children. Children should, therefore, be explicitly mentioned, and their specific rights expressly reflected in SoF deliberations.

The scope and elements of the SoF and beyond: a UN system that delivers on children's rights

The draft Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming (publication anticipated in July 2023) emphasises that “children’s rights are everybody’s business across all three pillars of the UN” and “all entities must be mindful of the implications for children of any action taken”.²

All 12 commitments made by Heads of States and Government in the UN75 Declaration (A/HRC/75/1) and the tracks proposed by the Secretary General and currently under discussion by Member States are relevant to all children and their rights, both now and into the future.

We call on Member States to **ensure that the scope and elements of the SoF ensure that current and future operations across the three UN pillars are underpinned in human rights, including children's rights**. To ensure a UN system that delivers on children's rights, we recommend to:

- **Under the Chapeau: Ensure that human rights, with an explicit reference to children's rights, and Leaving No One Behind are included as a cross-cutting issues to be considered in deliberations on all thematic clusters.** Such cross-cutting issues must ensure **that children in all their diversity and their rights are considered under each cluster**. As mentioned in the Interim People's Pact for the Future “Adopting intersectional and intergenerational approaches that recognize the importance of human rights across all policy domains is essential if human rights are to be protected for all”. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights’ new vision for human rights to be launched in December 2023 will be key to inform these discussions and States should show commitment to consider his new vision.
- **Under the cluster on transforming Global Governance:**
 - We encourage all Member States to elaborate on one of the main recommendations from the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism and request a UN-wide strategy to implement children's rights. Children are the only group with a specific human rights treaty that lacks a dedicated UN-wide strategy to ensure coherence, implement obligations and protect children's rights across the multilateral system.³ A strategy of this nature is key to reinforce the UN's capacity to support Member States to implement children's rights and deliver on the 2030 Agenda. Such a strategy should be developed with the participation of a diverse group of children from around the world.
 - We note that the UN lacks a definition of youth and therefore, there is an overlap between the children and youth demographic. When expanding spaces for meaningful engagement of youth in all UN decision-making process, including the establishment of the Youth Office, there is a need to ensure these mechanisms have the necessary expertise on child rights, child participation and child safeguarding given the overlap between children and youth. Young people are uniquely placed to support children's meaningful participation through peer-to-peer methods. Intergenerational approaches to research are increasingly showing how youth-led research methods can

² Draft Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming, https://childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/sg-guidance-note-on-child-rights-mainstreaming_draft_february2023.pdf

³ High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism report, p. 17: https://highleveladvisoryboard.org/breakthrough/pdf/56892_UNU_HLAB_report_Final_LOWRES.pdf

provide a fruitful approach to enabling children to meaningfully take part in discussions about 'difficult questions' that adults may often assume are too complex for children.

- We encourage Member States to ensure that the scope of the SoF includes taking steps to account for future generations. We support the creation of an Envoy for Future Generations, a Declaration for Future Generations to clarify commitment to securing the interests of future generations, as well as a forum for discussion. As expressed by the Secretary-General, it is key to ensure “the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, in particular children and young people as current and future decision makers with the greatest affinity for future generations”.⁴
- Under the cluster on Sustainable Development and Financing, we encourage Member States to ensure that children and their rights continue to be a key part of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and that they are at the core of discussions to shape the post-2030 Agenda and the World Social Summit in 2025.
- **Under the cluster on Digital Cooperation**, we call on Member States to ensure a Global Digital Compact that upholds consistent global standards with the protection of children’s rights as a core and guiding principle. This would convey a recognition of the way in which new technologies play a role in most aspects of our lives, especially the lives of children, as one in three internet users is a child, and, since the COVID-19 pandemic, children’s development, relationships, education, and play are increasingly mediated by digital technologies. Regulating and enforcing businesses’ responsibility to respect children’s rights, prevent and remedy abuse, including through providing children with a high level of privacy, safety and security by design and default, is urgent for ensuring children’s rights in the digital environment. Key recommendations on how to ensure a child rights approach in the Global Digital Compact can be found [here](#).

As we strive for a “people-centered” multilateral system, if the system doesn’t have a child-centered lens and doesn’t deliver for the full rights for children, the future of multilateralism will be failing one-third of the world’s population.

Endorsing organisations:

1. Child Rights Connect
2. Terre des hommes International Federation
3. Learning For Wellbeing Foundation
4. International Society for Pediatrics and Child Health (ISSOP)
5. Alana Institute

⁴ Our Common Agenda Policy Brief Future Generations, p.17: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-future-generations-en.pdf>