

# 2024-25 UNICEF Australia Pre-budget Submission

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## Overview

At the beginning of 2024, Australia faces an increasingly volatile domestic and international environment, and as the Government lays out its plans for the 2024-25 Budget, it confronts the difficult task of striking a balance between providing immediate relief for those struggling at home, and securing their futures by seeking stability abroad.

Australia is far from immune to the economic conditions which have created a global cost-of-living emergency, with families across the country desperately feeling the pinch. We know that international instability and conflict have contributed to these conditions, and to add to the ongoing and dire situation in Ukraine, 2023 saw renewed conflict in Israel and Gaza creating a humanitarian tragedy, and the eruption of hostilities in Sudan placing the lives of tens of millions of people at risk. These are but a snapshot of broader geo-political fragmentation.

All of this is happening under the spectre of a global climate emergency. The hottest year on record has seen multiple climate disasters leave a trail of destruction in their wake including in Australia, leaving families without homes, children without schools, and a surge in displaced peoples everywhere.

Both in Australia and around the world, UNICEF's mission is to protect and improve the lives of children who are not just present but over-represented in these overlapping crises. Never has the need for organisations that can rapidly deploy and respond to these events globally been more important. For Australia, investing in children and young people here and abroad makes Australia more resilient, prepared, productive, harmonious and safer, as it faces increasing challenges.

The Budget proposals we outline for consideration represent not just an investment in children and young people today, but an investment in the very future wellbeing of Australia. Children today are the custodians and leaders of tomorrow, and if we can spend our money on children and families in the most effective way now, Australia will reap the enormous and compounding benefits that come with that investment in future.

We start with foundational investments in children across the country, to ensure the rights of all children are both provided for as well as upheld through strengthened accountability, with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This means ensuring every child has a birth certificate so they can enjoy their rights fully throughout their life, and then tracking the wellbeing of children across their lives so we can ensure our investments are really making an impact for them. The creation of a dedicated National Commissioner for Aboriginal children, plus increased resources for our existing National Children's Commissioner, provides the accountability needed to see our investments in children through to fruition.

We present proposals across two issues that are front of mind for children and young people everywhere – online safety and climate change. For the former, there is an opportunity for Australia to become a vanguard for combatting the online exploitation and abuse of children by bringing the world-leading Disrupting Harm research to our shores, protecting the safety of children at home and in our local region. In climate change, investment in resiliency and recovery for children and their families will better prepare them in the face of increased climate disasters at home, and in our local region the creation of a youth climate leaders program would help show that Australia is serious about playing a leading role in climate action globally.

Finally, increases to overseas development and humanitarian aid - including funding contributions through organisations like UNICEF - will support our neighbours both near and far, improve children's lives, make our country safer, and show that Australia is a trusted and preferred partner in our local region and beyond. In this increasingly volatile environment, surely this investment in stability and security is welcome.

UNICEF Australia presents these Budget recommendations to Government for its consideration, and we look forward to discussing them with Ministers, officials, and Treasury over the coming months.

## Summary of Recommendations

### 1. Invest in the futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- a) *Fund a nation-wide guarantee at a cost of approximately \$1.5 million per year, which provides a free first birth certificate for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.*
- b) *Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People at a cost of approximately \$5.2 million per annum.*

### 2. Ensure the wellbeing of Australia by making all children a national policy priority

- a) *Provide funding of \$450,000 per year for three years to refresh the Australian Children's Wellbeing Index with newly available data, and enable deep-dive analysis into specific domains of children's wellbeing which can guide Australia's investments.*
- b) *Increase funding for the National Children's Commissioner to approximately \$9 million over four years initially, paired with a review to establish the proper resourcing required for the Commissioner to perform their full statutory functions.*

### 3. Make Australia a world-leader in combatting online child sexual exploitation and abuse

- a) *Invest \$2 million over two years to bring the Disrupting Harm research project to Australia, to help protect children at home and abroad and make Australia a world-leader in tackling online child sexual exploitation and abuse.*

### 4. Protect children and young people from the worst impacts of climate change by placing them at the centre of climate-related action

- a) *Provide long-term flexible funding which is needs-based and risk-informed, for programs that strengthen children's resilience and recovery from climate disasters and in child-critical sectors across Australia.*
- b) *Provide funding for the full implementation of Australia's first National Health and Climate Strategy, to ensure the unique health impacts of climate change on children are addressed.*
- c) *Invest \$350,000 per year for three years to establish a regional youth climate leaders program, empowering young leaders across Australia and Asia-Pacific with the education, skills, and opportunities they need to drive climate action and participate in climate change policymaking globally.*

### 5. Position Australia as a good global citizen and partner in the region through strategic investment

- a) *Introduce a year-on-year real increase in the ODA budget, with a gradual increase over time to 0.5% of GNI.*
- b) *Double the Humanitarian Emergency Fund to \$300 million annually, to ensure Australia is able to adequately respond to increasing humanitarian need around the world.*
- c) *Restore UNICEF's annual core funding to \$41 million to support its work around the globe in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and UNICEF's global mission for children.*

## Detailed Recommendations

### 1. Invest in the futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Birth registration is a child's first right. It is their passport to protection throughout their life, establishing their existence under the law and allowing for their full participation in society over the course of their life. With birth registration comes access to a birth certificate, a pivotal document that allows a child, a young person, and then an adult, to access those things needed to take part in society.

Without a birth certificate there is no passport, drivers licence, tax file number, or bank account, and without these essential things, access to employment, health care, education, training, and welfare support, all become difficult. This creates disadvantage which cascades and compounds – no access to training can lead to unemployment, unemployment can lead to reliance on welfare support, no access to welfare support can lead to poverty, poverty can lead to poor health outcomes amongst others. At its worst, research has shown it can place a person on a trajectory to criminal justice involvement and even imprisonment, due to driving without a licence for which a birth certificate is a prerequisite.<sup>i</sup>

It is because of these protective factors that UNICEF has been a key player in birth registration for over 30 years, working around the world to help governments strengthen their birth registration systems. However, our attention turns now to a country in which few people know birth registration is even an issue – Australia.

While Australia enjoys a high rate of 98% of births under the age of 5 years registered with a civil authority, birth registration rates are much lower within particular populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>ii</sup> The true extent of under-registration is unknown but pockets of data provide an indication – a study in Queensland revealed that 15-18% of births to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers were not registered compared to 1.8% of births to non-Indigenous mothers.<sup>iii</sup> Similar research in Western Australia found that 11% of births to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers were not registered between 1980 and 2010.<sup>iv</sup>

There are a multitude of co-occurring and overlapping barriers contributing to birth under-registration in pockets of Australian society. The first and often easiest to identify is the role that cost plays. While birth registration is free, obtaining a birth certificate is not. As the two processes are taken as one at birth, the cost of the certificate may be confused with the cost of registration,<sup>v</sup> and for people facing financial hardship, this can act as a deterrent.

At a nation-wide level, one of the most impactful initial levers that policy makers could pull is making the first birth certificate free for all children.<sup>vi</sup> Acknowledging that this could come at a significant financial cost, it may be that a staged approach is best in which as a first step, the first birth certificate is made free for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia.

Longer-term, should Australia genuinely endeavour to achieve universal birth registration and unlock the benefits it would bring, particularly for our First Nations children, then perhaps it is within the realms of possibility for a nation as wealthy as ours to make birth certificates free for all children.

#### **Recommendation**

*Fund a nation-wide guarantee at a cost of approximately \$1.5 million per year, which provides a free first birth certificate for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.*

Australia already has a National Children's Commissioner, charged with upholding the rights of all Australian children. But Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience and realise their rights in unique ways. A specific focus on advancing the rights of Aboriginal children is needed to end the intergenerational cycles of disadvantage that many Aboriginal children face, ensuring their future prosperity.

The Productivity Commission's recent review of Closing the Gap found that there is an accountability gap in our implementation of the agreement, lacking a mechanism that is both focused on Aboriginal children, independent from government, and matched with statutory powers.<sup>vii</sup> The natural solution to this gap is a dedicated National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.

Around half of Australia's states and territories have established or committed to dedicated Aboriginal Children's Commissioners which have already seen success in identifying challenges and driving systems change, but there is a need for a national role to provide overall coordination and accountability on critical issues that have been identified.

Thankfully, SNAICC – the national peak body for Aboriginal children – has already undertaken scoping work on a proposal for a dedicated National Commissioner for Aboriginal children, which UNICEF Australia supports. This Commissioner would provide a dedicated voice for Aboriginal children and young people, and support collaboration and coordinated between Australian jurisdictions. They would also be responsible for ensuring accountability of the Australian Government, investigating key child rights issues, monitoring progress of reforms, and developing solutions to protracted challenges.

The proposed model is based on best-practice in international standards for human rights institutions and would require both resourcing and enabling legislation for its various functions including accountability and reporting, evidence development, complaints investigations, and community and stakeholder engagement. Establishing a dedicated National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People would show that the Australian Government is following through on one of its key commitments to improve the lives of our First Peoples.

#### **Recommendation**

*Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People at a cost of approximately \$5.2 million per annum.*

## **2. Ensure the wellbeing of Australia by making all children a national policy priority**

At a time when the Australian Government is taking a welcome approach to expanding the scope of budgets beyond purely economic means - through the Measuring What Matters framework - the need for a comprehensive national data set tracking the wellbeing of children is more needed than ever.

Thankfully, although Australia currently lacks a national dataset which tracks the holistic wellbeing of children, UNICEF Australia and ARACY have undertaken to develop one in its stead through the creation of the [Australian Children's Wellbeing Index](#). The Index aims to use data to describe how Australian children are faring across all aspects of wellbeing and how this is changing, and is organised using the Nest, Australia's evidence-based framework for child and youth wellbeing.

In the absence of a government-held national dataset on children's wellbeing, the Wellbeing Index is a best-practice model for how it can be done. The Index is also an essential tool for tracking children's wellbeing while the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare develops a national child wellbeing data asset, as per Measure 29 of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-30*. With that data asset still years away, the Wellbeing Index is an industry leading alternative which will empower the government to make evidence-based policy and budgetary decisions for Australia's children.

Whilst the Australian Children's Wellbeing Index is currently helping us better understand the needs of Australia's children, it requires regular updating as new data is released to maintain an accurate picture of child wellbeing, which Government investment can enable. This would also enable the Index to be further built out and used to examine the different domains of children's wellbeing through deep-dive analysis into specific areas that require pressing attention.

Government investment in the Index would allow decision makers and policy professionals to track Australia's progress towards improving child wellbeing over the long-term, regularly feeding back into the budget process to ensure our investments in Australia's next generation are producing their desired outcomes.

#### **Recommendation**

*Provide funding of \$450,000 per year for three years to refresh the Australian Children's Wellbeing Index with newly available data, and enable deep-dive analysis into specific domains of children's wellbeing which can guide Australia's investments.*

Australia's National Children's Commissioner performs an essential role in ensuring the rights and wellbeing of Australia's children. The Commissioner is charged with many statutory responsibilities, from raising awareness about children's rights, to research and evidence building, accountability, and consulting with children and their families about their rights and needs.

Unfortunately, the Commissioner's current resourcing prevents them from fully performing their statutory functions, particularly undertaking consultation with vulnerable children, and although reviews of the Commissioner's funding have been recommended by parliamentary inquiries,<sup>viii</sup> no such reviews have taken place.

An accurate assessment of the resources required for the National Children's Commissioner to fully perform their functions is needed, to ensure that the future wellbeing and rights of Australia's children are secured. Additionally, an immediate increase in the Commissioner's funding would be welcome and enable them to perform their essential function in upholding the rights of Australia's children now. Recent funding dedicated for a Freedom of Information Commissioner, at around \$9 million over four years, provides a helpful starting point for the level of resourcing required.

#### **Recommendation**

*Increase funding for the National Children's Commissioner to approximately \$9 million over four years initially, paired with a review to establish the proper resourcing required for the Commissioner to perform their full statutory functions.*

### **3. Make Australia a world-leader in combatting online child sexual exploitation and abuse**

Digital technologies undoubtedly bring many benefits to children's lives, but as with all spaces children inhabit, the digital environment exposes them to risks, including one of the greatest emerging threats to children's protection – online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA).

Recent research and evidence are beginning to shed some light on the prevalence of OCSEA in Australia and our local region:

- 28.5% of Australians have experienced child sexual abuse according to the Australian Child Maltreatment Study;<sup>ix</sup>
- 1 in 6 Australian men report sexual feelings towards children, and 1 in 10 Australian men report they have sexually offended against a child, according to research from the University of New South Wales;<sup>x</sup>
- In 2023, the Australia Centre to Counter Child Exploitation received more than 40,000 reports of online child sexual exploitation;<sup>xi</sup>
- 1 in 8 Australians who use mobile dating apps and/or dating websites report receiving requests to facilitate the sexual exploitation of their own children or children they have access to;<sup>xii</sup>
- Australia is estimated to be the third largest market in the world for livestreamed online child sexual abuse.<sup>xiii</sup>

The internet has no borders thus OCSEA is a global, cross-border issue and one in which Australia is already playing a leading role, evidenced through key initiatives like the creation of the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, and the development of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*.

UNICEF is also playing a leading role in the global fight against OCSEA. [The Safe Online initiative at the End Violence Fund](#) has invested USD\$15 million in the [Disrupting Harm](#) project, a joint research effort by UNICEF, INTERPOL and ECPAT International. Disrupting Harm conducts multi-sectoral, multi-method national-level research to determine children's exposure to online sexual exploitation and abuse and the capacity of law enforcement, the social service workforce, and judiciary to respond to these crimes.

Disrupting Harm is the most comprehensive data collection effort on online child sexual abuse to date. The project has been completed in 13 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia and is currently ongoing in another 12 countries in Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle-East and South Asia. UNICEF Australia is eager to bring this world-leading research to Australia, making us the first high-income country in the world to undertake it and placing Australia at the forefront of tackling this pernicious problem.

The Disrupting Harm project uses multi-method research including national household surveys with children, interviews with children and caregivers, frontline workers, justice professionals and law enforcement, as well as desk-based reviews and analysis of national legislation and policies. Taking approximately two years to complete, the research project ultimately provides a detailed, data-driven pathway for government and civil society to strengthen prevention and response to online sexual exploitation and abuse, including evidence on:

- How many children in Australia experience different forms of online sexual abuse;
- Who the most common perpetrators are, and who children report these crimes to;
- The capacity of the frontline service workforce to support children who seek help;
- The experience and capacity of lawyers, magistrates and professionals working in courts with cases of online sexual exploitation and abuse;
- How Australian law enforcement is currently operating within this crime area and opportunities for new approaches;
- Any gaps in the current legislative and policy environment; and
- Promising practices in Australia to prevent and respond to online sexual exploitation and abuse.

By conducting a Disrupting Harm national assessment, Australia would be the first high-income country in the world to do in-depth research on online child sexual abuse that will significantly aid the government's capacity to prevent and respond to this crime. There is an unprecedented opportunity to collaborate with the government, Australian research institutions and civil society organisations, to fill critical gaps in evidence and develop new solutions. It would firmly establish Australia's leadership on this issue globally and inform the important work of the eSafety Commissioner.

The scalable methodology also enables countries to compare results, identify national differences and global similarities, to help policymakers and practitioners understand how this problem needs to be tackled in-country and internationally. In this sense, Australia would be making a significant contribution to our Asia-Pacific neighbours, helping boost security in the region, and further illustrating Australia's commitment to being a good global citizen and partner of choice in the region.

#### **Recommendation**

*Invest \$2 million over two years to bring the Disrupting Harm research project to Australia, to help protect children at home and abroad and make Australia a world-leader in tackling online child sexual exploitation and abuse.*

#### **4. Protect children and young people from the worst impacts of climate change by placing them at the centre of climate-related action**

Australia is being hit by increasingly frequent and intense climate-related disasters like floods, heatwaves, droughts, and bushfires. Children and young people are highly exposed and uniquely vulnerable to these shocks and hazards. In the summer of 2019-2020 alone, 2 in 5 children and young people were personally impacted by bushfires; 3 in 10 were personally impacted by drought; and almost 25% were personally impacted by floods.<sup>xiv</sup> The 2022 Northern New South Wales (NSW) and Southeast Queensland floods impacted more than 15,000 homes, over 944 education facilities, leaving an estimated 4,000 children in NSW alone requiring intensive support.<sup>xv</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of these disasters, children may lose loved ones, homes and property, pets and possessions, experience displacement, lose power, water, phones, and the internet. They may lose access to learning and education in early learning centres or schools, recreational spaces, and healthcare, and may have to deal with the flow-on effects of heightened stress and anxiety among adults around them, including increased incidences of domestic and family violence.<sup>xvi</sup>

In the medium and long-term, children who experience these shocks and hazards are particularly susceptible to longer term mental health issues, which in turn can cascade into lower educational attainment, and affect wellbeing and employment outcomes well into adulthood.<sup>xvii</sup> Research on the 2009 'Black Saturday' bushfires shows that impacted communities were reporting symptoms of psychological distress and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder three to four years after exposure.<sup>xviii</sup> For children and young people, these mental health issues had lasting impacts on progress in literacy and numeracy, which translated to lower academic scores up to the end of high school.<sup>xix</sup> These impacts are particularly detrimental to individuals and communities already grappling with pre-existing disadvantages, but also to employment, productivity, and national debt in the long run.

Addressing these needs is vital to strengthen resilience and recovery from climate-related disasters and ensure the long-term health and wellbeing of children, young people and the communities they live in. We can do this through risk-informed investment in multifaceted programs that address the needs of children and their families affected by disasters and support their long-term recovery and resilience. Expertise, institutions, and programs should be identified across the key domains of need and wellbeing for children and young people, and funding should be available for long-term interventions (5 - 10 years) tailored to the needs of specific communities, and ideally, in collaboration with local community services. [Examples](#) of successful programs like these



already exist and as the frequency and intensity of disasters increases, we should expect a need for the significant scale-up of this type of investment.

#### **Recommendation**

*Provide long-term flexible funding which is needs-based and risk-informed, for programs that strengthen children's resilience and recovery from climate disasters and in child-critical sectors across Australia.*

UNICEF Australia welcomed the focus on children in the recent release of the Australian Government's new *National Health and Climate Strategy* at COP28 in December 2023. This focus recognises that children are uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Children are less able to physically withstand the impacts of climate change than most adults - their bodies and minds are less developed, and they are more susceptible to toxins, pollutants and health impacts including mental health risks associated with extreme weather events.<sup>xx</sup>

In this regard, the Strategy is a significant step in the right direction by including children and young people as a priority. Now we need to act on the Strategy so that its benefits can be realised, including through investment in its actions, backed by the whole-of-government structures needed to support its implementation. This extends to the states and territories who will also need to implement interventions within their respective jurisdictions which also prioritise the needs of children and young people.

The creation of the *National Health and Climate Strategy* is a once in a generation opportunity to ensure we adequately addresses the current and future health impacts of climate change on all Australians including children, so its funding and implementation is a pressing priority.

#### **Recommendation**

*Provide funding for the full implementation of Australia's first National Health and Climate Strategy, to ensure the unique health impacts of climate change on children are addressed.*

Children and young people across Australia and the Indo-Pacific are among the most exposed and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change today - 140 million children in the region are highly exposed to water scarcity; 120 million children are highly exposed to flooding; 210 million children are highly exposed to cyclones; and 420 million children are highly exposed to air pollution.<sup>xxi</sup>

Despite this, young people in these countries believe that decision-makers are not listening to their voices or representing their interests in climate and disaster policymaking. The landmark 2020 *Our World Our Say* survey found that only 13% of young Australians felt that they were listened to by leaders in government on climate change issues.<sup>xxii</sup> And a 2021 survey of adolescents and youth from 37 countries, including within the Indo-Pacific region, found that 84% of respondents felt their government's efforts to include their views in climate change policymaking were insufficient.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The urgency of the climate crisis, the complex, varied nature of its cascading impacts on children and young people in our region, and the fact that children and young people bear the highest cost of the crisis in coming decades, makes addressing child and youth participation in climate change policymaking a bigger imperative. Indeed, there is international recognition now of its importance - the COP28 Presidency recently created a new leadership position, a Youth Climate Champion, to improve participation and representation of young people in international climate decision-making.

The Australian Government has an opportunity to capitalise on this momentum and show that we want to play a leading role in climate action globally. This includes empowering children and young people in Australia and across the region with the education, skills, and opportunities they require to drive climate action. This can come in the form of investment in a young climate leaders program that supports genuine and inclusive youth participation in climate action, including policy making. As climate action is required at a regional and global level, the program would include participants from Australia and across Asia-Pacific, and provide support for this network to be represented in international climate discussions and activities.

Young people have been central to the climate movement globally. Investment in a program to train young climate leaders would help make Australia and our local region a world-leader in youth-led climate action moving forward, ensuring that at home and abroad, we are better prepared to thrive in our climate changed future.

#### **Recommendation**

*Invest \$350,000 per year for three years to establish a regional youth climate leaders program, empowering young leaders across Australia and Asia-Pacific with the education, skills, and opportunities they need to drive climate action and participate in climate change policymaking globally.*

### **5. Position Australia as a good global citizen and partner in the region through strategic investment**

UNICEF Australia appreciates the tight fiscal environment the Government is facing and, in this context, welcomes recent increases to Official Development Assistance including the nominal increase of \$117million in last year's budget. However, ODA remains a key pillar of Australia's contribution to addressing international development issues at global scale. With an ODA/Gross National Income (GNI) ratio of 0.19%, Australia currently ranks 28 out of 31 OECD donors on aid generosity – the lowest of G7 economies.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Recent surveys from the Lowy Institute<sup>xxv</sup> and the ANU's Development Policy Centre<sup>xxvi</sup> respectively show that more Australians now want the Government to maintain or increase our aid budget, compared with 2019. The key takeaway, according to the ANU's Terence Wood, is that "most Australians don't want aid cut right now."<sup>xxvii</sup>

The Government's recent ODA increases put us on the right trajectory as a good global citizen to help address a multitude of development issues. However, given the significant need across the region and the globe, a gradual increase of ODA over time to 0.5% of GNI is required.

#### **Recommendation**

*Introduce a year-on-year real increase in the ODA budget, with a gradual increase over time to 0.5% of GNI.*

The continued global poly-crisis involving climate-related disasters, rising conflict, and challenges to the rules-based order, is driving an unprecedented increase in humanitarian need. Nearly 300million people around the world will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2024 due to conflict, climate emergencies and other drivers.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Within this surge in humanitarian need, children are facing particularly dire circumstances. 1 in 5 children around the world is living in or fleeing from conflict, and 258 million people face acute food insecurity including wasting which threatens the lives of 45 million children under the age of 5.<sup>xxix</sup> In response to this scale of need, the United Nations and partner organisations are appealing for USD \$46.4billion.<sup>xxx</sup>

Although Australia has made several recent welcome announcements to humanitarian funding for specific contexts including in Gaza and Myanmar, our overall funding to respond to humanitarian crises remains stagnant and the Humanitarian Emergency Fund has not been increased since 2018. A doubling of the fund to \$300 million annually is needed to meet the scale of need and help ensure Australia can respond more effectively in an increasingly volatile global environment.

#### **Recommendation**

*Double the Humanitarian Emergency Fund to \$300 million annually, to ensure Australia is able to adequately respond to increasing humanitarian need around the world.*

In the context of Australia's investments in international development and humanitarian support, UNICEF offers a unique proposition to help the Government achieve its vision of being a good global citizen and deepening regional relationships. UNICEF's efficiency and effectiveness at global scale is demonstrated both by our footprint in 190 countries, and by our ability to rapidly negotiate humanitarian access and adequately manage risk in response to complex humanitarian contexts, as we have done recently utilising government contributions to respond to crises in Syria/Türkiye and now Gaza.

UNICEF also has strong partnerships with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Community, as demonstrated by the signing of a second five-year Framework Agreement for Cooperation (FAC) with ASEAN. Alongside the FAC, a corresponding rolling workplan of 44 joint activities are currently under implementation in the areas of health, nutrition, education, WASH, social welfare and development, climate change, disaster risk reduction and adolescent participation and empowerment.

UNICEF has the ability to mobilise both public and private resources and enhance people to people connections. In 2022, UNICEF Australia mobilised over \$48 million in funding from the private sector. We directly support programmes in the Asia-Pacific region and hold uniquely strong relationships with UNICEF Country Offices in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Pacific, and Southeast Asia. We have deployed combined private and public sector surge funding to humanitarian emergencies in countries such as Türkiye and Syria, Gaza, India, Sri Lanka, China, PNG, Fiji, Vietnam, and Tonga.

Given our strengths as a go-to partner for the government, supporting UNICEF's annual core funding can help the Australian Government achieve its goals in the region and globally. Our 75 years of experience has shown that contributing to core resources for results (RR) is the most effective way to support children. Core funding gives UNICEF the certainty to plan and implement long-term programmes for children, the flexibility to address challenging and rapidly changing contexts, and the efficiency that comes from reducing transaction costs and maximising resources that go directly to children. In the East Asia Pacific region, core funding has enabled us to:

- be equipped with fit-for-purpose technical expertise and capacity at the country level. On average, 60-65% of RR in this region are being used for technical assistance provided by programme experts to governments and partners;
- support and scale up innovative approaches and take calculated risks to bring innovative solutions for children in an uncertain world;
- be able to respond to critical gaps in the early stages of humanitarian response, and for the delivery of vaccines where there are shortfalls in logistical support;
- have strong risk management mechanisms to ensure that due diligence is assured for engagement with partners, including for child safeguarding and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

The *Partnership Framework between AusAID and UNICEF 2008-2015* agreed under the previous Labor Government saw the Australian Government's annual core funding to UNICEF reach \$34.4million. Since 2014, the core funding has been on a decline to an annual investment of just \$19 million in 2023. In comparison, Australia's annual average contributions to the International Development Association of the World Bank Group from 2017 to 2020 has been approximately \$160 million. A restoration of UNICEF's annual core funding to former levels (adjusted for inflation) will help the Government efficiently deliver impact at scale, both in the region and around the world, boosting our standing as a model global citizen and leader on the international stage.

#### **Recommendation**

*Restore UNICEF's annual core funding to \$41 million to support its work around the globe in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and UNICEF's global mission for children.*

- <sup>i</sup> Gerber, P., & Castan, M. (Eds.) (2021). *Critical Perspectives on Human Rights Law in Australia: Volume 2*. (1st ed.), Chapter 5: Realising the Right to Birth Registration in Australia (Melissa Castan, Geeta Shyam, Paula Gerber) <https://research.monash.edu/en/publications/critical-perspectives-on-human-rights-law-in-australia-volume-2>, citing Alice Barter 'Chapter 5: Indigenous Driving Issues in the Pilbara Region' in Melissa Castan and Paula Gerber (eds), *Proof of Birth (Future Leaders 2015)* 62, 63.
- <sup>ii</sup> Australian Government, 'Children under 5 registered with a civil authority' *Australian Government's Reporting Platform on the SDG Indicators* (Web Page, 17 July 2018) <<https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/goals/peace-and-justice/16.9.1#metadata1>>; Paula Gerber and Melissa Castan 'Chapter 1: The Right to Universal Birth Registration in Australia' in Melissa Castan and Paula Gerber (eds), *Proof of Birth (Future Leaders 2015)* 3, 3.
- <sup>iii</sup> Queensland Ombudsman, 'The Indigenous Birth Registration Report: An Investigation into the Under-Registration of Indigenous births in Queensland' (Report, June 2018) vii.
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