

**Statement of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
At the 2017 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction  
Cancun, Mexico 24-26 May**

Your Excellency and Distinguished Colleagues.

We would like to thank the Government of Mexico for hosting the Conference.

Disaster Risk Reduction is a priority for UNICEF and we appreciate the efforts undertaken to implement the Sendai Framework. The focus on disaster risk reduction is an important contribution to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

Global experience shows that the impact of disasters is felt most in the poorest and most disadvantaged countries — and by the poorest and most disadvantaged people — particularly children - within these countries.

Disasters continue to impact children now and in the longer term: In 2016, an estimated 535 million children — nearly a quarter of the world's children — lived in countries affected by armed conflict, violence, natural disaster and chronic crises.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that by 2018, half of the world's poor will live in fragile situations.<sup>2</sup> Crises are becoming more frequent and more complex, lasting longer and affecting more people. The impact of conflict, natural disasters and climate change is forcing children to flee their homes, trapping them behind conflict lines, and putting them at risk of disease, violence and exploitation.

Children are affected by disasters in myriad ways — death or injury, and the threat of disease caused by disrupted access to basic services such as health, nutrition, safe water and sanitation. By missing out on education, they are robbed of the opportunity to grow and nurture their minds during critical developmental years. Children can further suffer from psychological trauma, or face exploitation, violence, abuse, displacement, and separation from their caregivers. All of these effects have long-term consequences, not only for the children themselves, but for generations to come.

There is no doubt that children are among the most vulnerable to hazards. What is less recognized is that they have an important role to play in reducing risk. Girls and boys, have proven capable of mapping the hazards they face, identifying those people most at risk and advocating for change. They can play an even more significant role where they are part of national and community plans and processes. We have heard examples of this, including from Mexico, over the last few days.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Nearly a Quarter of the World's Children Live in Conflict or Disaster-Stricken Countries', UNICEF Press Release, December 2016. The figures have been calculated by using population data for countries where UNICEF has a humanitarian appeal. <[https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_93863.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_93863.html)>

<sup>2</sup> *Fragile States: Domestic revenue mobilization in fragile states*, OECD, Paris, 2014, p. 95.

Since Sendai, UNICEF has worked with its government, UN and NGO partners to promote:

- Multi-hazard risk assessments, based on data that is inclusive and is disaggregated by age, gender and disability;
- The strengthening of primary health care systems, through risk-informed analysis and decentralization that emphasizes community-based solutions to reduce vulnerability and increase sustainability;
- The strengthening of water, sanitation and hygiene services by considering additional risks posed by climate change, while also building the adaptive capacity of communities;
- A recognition of the special role schools and education play in reducing disaster risk, including support to scale up structural safety of schools and emergency preparedness;
- The development of social protection and safety net measures, for those most at risk, to mitigate the impacts of floods, droughts and other shocks.

UNICEF is committed to strengthening the resilient development of girls and boys and to strengthening the systems they require to flourish. Among other things, this requires better integration of humanitarian and development work, focused on the underlying drivers of risk. UNICEF will continue to support the development of capacities for preparedness and effective response, which lies at the heart of disaster risk reduction.

In supporting partners to operationalize the new Disaster Risk Reduction framework UNICEF will promote, as appropriate, a multi-hazard approach linking measures to address disasters, climate change, conflict and epidemics.

Last but certainly not least, as disaster risk is an intergenerational issue, UNICEF will continue to work with its partners to promote the participation and rights of all children, and women, in DRR and their vital role in strengthening resilience.