



2023-24 Budget Submission

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

3 February 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Save the Children Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Executive Summary

The 2023-24 Federal Budget provides the Australian Government with an opportunity to support children by investing in their security, wellbeing and development. Both in Australia and across the region, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have fallen disproportionately on poorer households, making it more difficult for them to invest in their children, many of whom are missing out on education, nutritious food, and community and psychosocial support; while their exposure to violence is increasing, alongside their vulnerability to climate impacts and forced displacement in humanitarian crises.

To respond to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, alongside other risk multipliers like climate change and humanitarian crises in several locations around the Indo-Pacific, Save the Children is calling on the Australian Government to deliver on its National Policy Platform commitment to “increase aid as a percentage of Gross National Income every year that we are in office starting with our first budget”, and to move towards the goal of 0.5% of Gross National Income as a matter of urgency.

Internationally, we are calling on the Australian Government to commit to children by providing **additional** funding to enable the following targeted investments:

1. \$77.3 million over three years to establish pilot child benefit payments, child disability benefit payments, and adult disability benefit payments in the Pacific
2. \$65.22 million over three years in ending violence against children in the Pacific
3. Increasing Australia’s climate finance commitment to \$3 billion over 2020-2025, committing an additional \$400 million to the Green Climate Fund by 2024 and allocating \$100 million to support loss and damage financing
4. Increasing Australia’s humanitarian funding allocation to \$1.15 billion in response to increased and intensified need, and more complex emergencies, and reflecting Australia’s “fair share”
5. Providing additional funding for humanitarian resettlement, repatriation of Australians from Syria and the Education Cannot Wait replenishment

In Australia, we are proposing a limited number of practical initiatives that would have far-reaching impact if implemented. Save the Children calls on the Australian Government to commit to children through the following measures:

1. Contribute \$14.6 million over four years to engage children at risk of disengaging from school
2. Provide \$7.05 million over two years to provide school-based wellbeing support in flood-affected communities across South East Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW
3. Implement systemic reforms needed to set up the long term success of Australia’s social and economic trajectory by making children a national policy priority

Save the Children’s recommendations and costings on how the Australian government can support COVID-19 recovery and the development of children in Australia and the Indo-Pacific, to better protect and promote children’s rights, are outlined below.

International Context

In 2022, it became clear that not only has the COVID-19 pandemic not abated, according to the World Bank it has actually “triggered the most pronounced setback in the fight against global poverty since 1990, and most likely since World War II.” Put another way, “the magnitude of the COVID-19-induced increase [in poverty] is more than four times larger than the [1990s] Asian Financial Crisis-induced increase, after controlling for differences in global population.” That translates to 90 million **additional** poor people — “the net impact of the pandemic.”¹

This setback has produced heterogenous impacts, and Australia’s region is experiencing a complex patchwork of these effects. For example, although some upper middle-income countries were able to finance cash transfers to citizens through the pandemic’s lockdowns, others, and most of the world’s lower-middle-income countries, including many in Australia’s region, have seen increases in poverty.² Further, not all losses have been monetary. As the World Bank elaborates, “some countries have suffered high mortality and education losses, but they have been able to limit the impacts of monetary poverty by enacting social protection policies.” Other countries have seen limited increases in mortality but have recorded significant monetary poverty or education losses.”³ These losses are now imposing a variety of costs “on the life chances of the following generation.”⁴ In terms of broad trends, women, the less educated, informal workers, and the self-employed have been hit hardest. In Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, young, female, and less skilled workers suffered the most job losses. In India, women’s employment has not recovered.⁵ In the Pacific, World Bank household surveys point to a severe cash crunch at the household level that customary mutual help traditions have not been able to alleviate despite being revived and updated to mobilise social media networks.⁶

The Federal Budget for 2023-24 is an excellent opportunity for Australia to step up further to support the countries of the Indo-Pacific to turn their development trajectories back around. Australia’s *Partnerships for Recovery* strategy was a sound starting point for responding to COVID-19’s immediate exigencies, and it will soon be replaced by a new International Development Policy.⁷ Australia has also increased its ODA allocation from previous lows – a good starting point in the context of receding development gains across the Indo-Pacific region. Save the Children applauds Australia’s increased investment including funding for vaccines and partnerships in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, as well as direct budget support for Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Indonesia, to fund system-strengthening work in health and social protection or maintaining community-level service provision. Australia has also increased the amount of money available to the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility in the Pacific (AIFFP), which represents another excellent opportunity to invest in regional social infrastructure and in other hard infrastructure projects that could be leveraged for human development aims.

¹ See our section below on pilot child payments in the Pacific, alongside The World Bank, ‘Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course’, 50, accessed 6 October 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity>.

² The World Bank, 4.

³ The World Bank, 99.

⁴ The World Bank, 195.

⁵ The World Bank, 79.

⁶ ‘COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea - Economic and Social Impacts: Insights from the Fourth Round of High Frequency Phone Surveys - Data Collected in December 2021’, accessed 23 January 2023, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/37736>.

⁷ DFAT. “Partnerships for Recovery: Australia’s COVID-19 Development Response,” 2020. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/aid/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response>.

Australia now has an opportunity to place the Indo-Pacific within a new development strategy that aims to support and expand the social infrastructure that can allow our neighbours to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach can also assist them to manage the impacts of climate change, while increasing their resilience to great power competition. It also has the potential to defray the risk of competing regional infrastructure aid blocs.

By “social” infrastructure, we mean the high-quality health and education systems that all our neighbours, across Southeast Asia and the Pacific, should enjoy. We also mean climate-proofed community halls, maternity wards, vaccination clinics, and primary schools, in addition to initiatives that stimulate the expansion of green industries.⁸ The idea also extends to developing national and universal social protection systems, including child benefit schemes, to protect jobs and wages, stimulate inclusive economic growth, support households to buy their children school supplies and nutritious foods, and protect the elderly and disabled when their families can no longer earn. Social protection systems are critical to addressing child poverty and building children’s human capital while also building the forms of state capacity that enable developing nations to focus more attention on children and their needs.⁹ The World Bank, too, has argued for social protection schemes to be established or expanded in the context of the present crisis.¹⁰

Save the Children’s international proposals for the 2022-23 Budget sit within an understanding of our domestic COVID-19 response and how we can support our Indo-Pacific neighbours to recover from the pandemic. They also chime with our recommendations to the Australian Government’s International Development Policy review last year. As a wealthy and prosperous country that wishes to shape its region in its interest, Australia has the capacity to do more in supporting low- and middle-income countries in our region.

Australian Context

Australia has reached an inflection point in our response to the extraordinary circumstances created by COVID-19. While the pandemic’s future course remains uncertain, it is fair to say that we have entered a new phase following the urgent responses of the pandemic’s first three years – a new phase characterised by a growing awareness of the pandemic’s far-reaching effects in the context of broader social and economic forces and circumstances.

How Australia responds now will determine the long-term success of our social and economic recovery. In particular, Australia’s future shape and prosperity depends on how this generation of children recovers from the extraordinary pressures they are facing. Children should be a top-order priority in Australia’s plan for the future, with recovery from COVID-19’s impacts at the top of the agenda.

⁸ Refer to Bowen, James. “Australia Should Build its Green Infrastructure Presence.” *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 14 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australia-should-build-its-green-infrastructure-presence>.

⁹ See also Save the Children. “Strengthening Australia’s Relationships with Countries in the Pacific Region,” Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade, 20 July 2020. Available at:

<https://devpolicy.org/coalition-starts-to-reverse-aid-cuts-20210121/>; and Save the Children. “Activating Greater Trade and Investment with Pacific Island Countries,” Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade, 15 May 2020. Available at: <https://devpolicy.org/coalition-starts-to-reverse-aid-cuts-20210121/>.

¹⁰ Refer to World Bank. “Long COVID.”

Children have been under huge pressure in recent years. Families are under enormous stress, children's routines have been broken, and their social connections and emotional wellbeing disrupted. Stress, uncertainty and anxiety have become the norm. In a world of COVID-19, global conflict, and increasingly severe floods, bushfires and other disasters, in the shadow of what many children perceive as the existential threat of climate change, a mental health crisis is brewing for children. Their physical health is also suffering.

Children's education and development has been severely interrupted. Education is the foundation of opportunity and economic prosperity. Yet engagement with learning dropped precipitously during the pandemic. Permanent disengagement looms for many. Australia cannot afford this loss.

COVID-19 has affected all Australian children. Yet some children face particular hardship. When families slide towards poverty or are put under untenable pressure, children's welfare, safety and emotional wellbeing is put at risk. COVID-19 threatens to permanently entrench existing intergenerational disadvantage.

COVID-19 has the potential to cause significant harm to a generation – to its development, learning and lifelong opportunities. If this is allowed to happen, it will entail staggering downstream costs for taxpayers and governments in reduced economic productivity and workforce participation, greater welfare reliance, and more strain on the public health and criminal justice systems.

Preventing harm or intervening as early as possible is always better, and vastly less costly, than dealing with problems later, once they have already become acute. There is no better early intervention than focusing on children and their needs.

Ensuring the Needs of Children are Incorporated into Budget Development and Measurement

Save the Children welcomes the Federal Government's work to develop a wellbeing framework for future Budgets, as signalled before and in the October 2022 Budget. Children's wellbeing, defined as the wellbeing of all children from birth to age 18, should explicitly be at the centre of any Australian wellbeing framework, including child-centred indicators and legislated commitments to child-related targets and child-sensitive budgeting. A wellbeing-based approach should focus our collective attention on the ultimate outcomes of government investment and other activity, as apparent through quality of life and development. This is most profoundly important and relevant when it comes to children.

We recommend that the wellbeing framework explicitly and substantively includes children's wellbeing, and is accompanied by other necessary institutions including developing a comprehensive National Children's Plan, appointing a Cabinet-level Minister for Children's Wellbeing, implementing arrangements for systematically considering the impacts of all government decisions on children, developing a national measure of student wellbeing that is regularly and transparently reported at a school level, and fully funding and implementing the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.¹¹

¹¹ Mental Health Commission, 'The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy', 2021. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/getmedia/9f2d5e51-dfe0-4ac5-b06a-97dbba252e53/National-children-s-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-Strategy-FULL>.

We also recommend that a wellbeing framework is reflective of a child rights approach towards Australia's development program and public budgeting. This can complement a focus on children's wellbeing in any Australian wellbeing framework. While indicators of wellbeing can encompass aspects of life from the biological, psychological, and social perspectives, a child rights perspective reflects a set of universal standards or norms rooted in formal entitlement to their fulfilment and corresponding obligations on those providing that guarantee.¹² Notably, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in its last review of Australia's performance under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, called on the Australian government to:

"...adopt a child rights-based approach in respect of its trade agreements and development aid policy and programmes, with the rights of children and their engagement included in programme design, delivery and evaluation".¹³

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended consistently that state parties develop child-specific budgets as a key aspect of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in 2016 the Committee adopted a General Comment 19 on Public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights, providing further guidance to governments and non-state actors on how to manage public expenditure for children.¹⁴ That includes ensuring that legislators have access to detailed, user-friendly information of how budget proposals will improve children's wellbeing and advance their rights.

Key Recommendations – International

1. Invest \$77.3 million over three years to establish pilot child benefit payments, child disability benefit payments, and adult disability benefit payments in the Pacific

Pacific households will not recover from the health, economic, and educational impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic based on grit and resilience alone. These impacts remain serious across the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) despite the resumption of tourism and a recovery in the minerals sector, in Fiji and PNG in 2022. The Asian Development Bank now expects that nascent recovery to stabilise, resulting in a write-down in projected growth from 5.4 to 4.8 per cent. The most important problem is that inflation remains forecast to rise steeply across the Pacific, including Fiji, and its largest source of tourists – Australia – for reasons ranging from the war in Ukraine to a slowdown in China and monetary tightening in the United States.¹⁵ Inflation is having a direct impact on increasing food insecurity in the Pacific. According to World Bank data, rates of severe food insecurity have sharply increased. The number of severely food insecure people has doubled since 2014, from 1.0 million people to 2.0 million in 2021. The change in the prevalence of severe food insecurity is significant, increasing from 2.5 to 4.5 percent, and has increased at a much higher

¹² Z. Vaghri et al. (eds.), Monitoring State Compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research 25, 2022. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84647-3_1.

¹³ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Australia, CRC/C/AUS/CO/5-6, 1 November 2019. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FAUS%2FCO%2F5-6&Lang=en.

¹⁴ Lundy, L., Orr, K., & Marshall, C., Children's rights budgeting and social accountability: Children's views on its purposes, processes and their participation. Global Campus of Human Rights Journal, 4(1), 91-113, 2020. Available at: <https://doi.org/20.500.11825/1699>.

¹⁵ 'Pacific Economic Monitor December 2022: The Future of Social Protection in the Pacific' (Asian Development Bank, 1 December 2022), 3, <https://doi.org/10.22617/SPR220568-2>.

and faster rate than both East Asia and Southeast Asia.¹⁶ In addition to inflation, climate change impacts are also worsening across the PICs, compounding this food stress by reducing, for example, the amount of arable land. This reduction is not to be taken lightly as the ability to rely on subsistence agricultural production has ensured access to nutritious food for households whose incomes have diminished over recent years. Access to smallholdings underpins customary mutual help traditions, which have been reinvigorated during the pandemic as access to cash has dried up. In short, community assistance is being called upon to carry more and more in conditions in which access to land and subsistence produce is growing progressively less secure while cash remains scarce.

The result of these developments is that conditions remain tight at the individual household level despite the strength of institutions like barter trade and subsistence agriculture. These conditions are raising serious concerns about Pacific children's already poor nutritional and educational outcomes as families' incomes are constricted. According to UNICEF, more than 22 million children were undernourished across East Asia and the Pacific before COVID-19, while only 20 per cent of children in the poorest population quintile had access to the internet.¹⁷ The impacts of the pandemic – and now inflation – have only made things worse. According to freely available data releases from the World Bank's High Frequency Phone Surveys in the Pacific, in PNG in 2021, households reported using a range of negative coping strategies including spending down savings and selling assets as well as removing children from school and one in four households reported experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity. Further, close to half of households perceived alcohol and drug abuse to be worsening.¹⁸ In a region where child undernutrition remains a significant problem – Timor Leste and PNG have the second and third highest stunting rates worldwide – the impact is likely devastating and lifelong.¹⁹

These results demonstrate that community assistance mechanisms are being pushed to their limits.²⁰ This lends weight to the argument that donors need to invest in permanent social protection systems so that long-term harm does not result to the human capital held in families and their children, and to hard-won national development gains. Yet three years into this pandemic, PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu all lack social protection systems. Without such systems, these three PICs have not been able to deliver proven interventions, such as cash transfers, that would alleviate household pressures and mitigate the need for coping mechanisms that compromise children's nutritional and educational futures. Donor assistance is necessary, and Australia should take the lead in assisting these three PICs to build the infrastructure they require

¹⁶ The World Bank, 'Reforms for Recovery: East Asia and Pacific Economic Update, October 2022', pp 38-39. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/east-asia-and-pacific-economic-update>

¹⁷ UNICEF. "Young Children and the Pandemic: UNICEF Early Childhood COVID-19 Response in East Asia and the Pacific," pp. 8, 10. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/young-children-and-pandemic-unicef-early-childhood-covid-19-response-east-asia-and>.

¹⁸ 'COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea - Economic and Social Impacts: Insights from the Fourth Round of High Frequency Phone Surveys - Data Collected in December 2021', accessed 23 January 2023, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/37736>.

¹⁹ Mercy Chipo Jumo, 'Shifting the Dial on Child Malnutrition in the Pacific and Timor-Leste', *Devpolicy Blog from the Development Policy Centre* (blog), 6 September 2022, <https://devpolicy.org/shifting-the-dial-on-child-malnutrition-in-pacific-timor-leste-20220907/>.

²⁰ Manoranjan Mohanty, "Informal Social Protection and Social Development in Pacific Island Countries: Role of NGOs and Civil Society," *Asia-Pacific Development Journal* 18:2, 2011: pp. 25-56.

to succeed. We note Australia's commitment to social protection, and we also note that PNG is planning to introduce a new child and maternity benefit, supported by Australia.²¹

We recognise that investment at such a significant scale is unlikely to proceed without pilot programs and proof of concept trials. Consequently, **we recommend an initial investment of \$77.3 million over three years from 2023-24. This investment should build on the system level work undertaken by the Australian Government funded Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP) and be aimed at instituting pilot payments to households in three sub-national government areas in three PICs**, namely Western Province in PNG, Malaita province in Solomon Islands, and Sanma province in Vanuatu. The payments should specifically be aimed at assisting children by directly targeting the costs of raising them, such as purchasing appropriate and nutritious food and educational supplies. We also recommend a special focus on children and adults with disabilities, who bear additional living costs for reasonable accommodations and services, and whose capacity to participate in meaningful employment and future economic recovery is more precarious and vulnerable.

Such pilots would allow for the impact of child-sensitive social protection on human capital to be assessed, just as they would contribute to the development of national capacity for ongoing delivery of social protection. Further, they could contribute to building support for the introduction of long-term, national-level investments in the lives, rights, and futures of Pacific children. We note that many of the leading sources of discussion on social protection, such as the World Bank, have not highlighted the specific needs of children in their recommendations, which otherwise largely align with ours, and we are seeking for this gap to be addressed.²²

We note that DFAT has successfully led similar pilot programs in the past via its MAHKOTA (Towards a Strong and Prosperous Indonesian Society) and KOMPAK (Governance for Growth) programs in Indonesia, including in Papua province, which shares many of the characteristics of the three countries we have identified, including underdeveloped facilities for service delivery and remoteness from national systems and structures. Despite these challenges, the BANGGA Papua program implemented an inclusive child grant for all indigenous Papuan children under the age of four in 2018.²³

In addition to coordination of child benefit payments, a successful scheme will link households to critical education, nutrition, protection, and other services in line with a proven 'cash-plus' approach. This approach would build on proven models in the region, including Save the Children's cash transfer programming in Fiji, which uses Vodafone's M-pesa platform to transfer funds to pre-selected households once a month for four months, as part of the Disaster READY program.²⁴ As the pandemic and present inflationary conditions continue, however, we are calling for a critical

²¹ Satriana, 'Social Protection in the Pacific and Timor-Leste'.

²² World Bank, "From Containment to Recovery," 2020. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eap/publication/east-asia-pacific-economic-update>.

²³ Karishma Huda, Fernando Carrera, Hector Salazar Salame, Anton Tarigan, & Shez Farooq. "An Inclusive Child Grant in Papua: Lessons Learnt from Implementing Cash Transfers in Remote Contexts.' MAHKOTA, Australian Government, 2020. Available at: https://socialprotection.org/sites/default/files/publications_files/An%20Inclusive%20Child%20grant%20in%20Papua%20Lessons%20Learnt%20from%20Implementing%20Cash%20Transfers%20in%20Remote%20Contexts.pdf.

²⁴ Save the Children. "Save the Children Launches a First-of-its-Kind Digital Cash Project to Help Fijian Families Devastated by COVID-19,' Media Release, 13 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/media/media-releases/cash-transfer-project-launch>.

departure from instituting successful, one-off, small-scale projects, an approach which we wish to see now form the core of a permanent, networked, Pacific-wide system, fit for the future.

Our costing is based on modelling commissioned from Development Pathways, and as elaborated in a fuller form in our Budget Submission for FY21/22.²⁵

Budget Initiative	2023-24 (\$m)	2024-25 (\$m)	2025-26 (\$m)	Total (\$m)
Pilot Payments	25.8	25.8	25.8	77.3

2. Invest \$65.22 million over three years in ending violence against children in the Pacific

Violence against children in the Pacific remains a critical issue that is yet to be addressed. Children's vulnerability continues to be exacerbated worldwide by multiple and overlapping crises, such as growing levels of poverty and increasing social and economic inequalities, forced displacement due to conflict and or climate change, environmental degradation, and natural disasters increasing in frequency and intensity. These issues, to varying degrees, are being felt across the Pacific and are impacting the lives of children.²⁶

Since announcing the Pacific Step-Up in 2017, Australian leaders in diplomacy and foreign policy have described the nations of the Pacific as Australia's "family."²⁷ And yet, despite this emphasis, there is still no dedicated Australian funding aimed at addressing violence against children, a significant problem affecting real, grassroots Pacific families, as we highlighted in our 2019 report, *Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment in Ending Violence Against Children in the Pacific and Timor Leste*.²⁸

This report, released prior to the pandemic, highlighted our research findings that, at the time of publication, more than 4 million Pacific children were experiencing violent discipline, 1 in 4 adolescent girls were experiencing physical violence, and 1 in 10 adolescent girls were experiencing sexual violence.²⁹ Much of this violence occurs in the home.

The safety of children in their home has become an even more significant challenge for Pacific children in the context of the pandemic. A research brief release by UNICEF in 2022 reported

²⁵ To begin the more detailed work of designing, commissioning, and advocating for such an important, system-building intervention, Save the Children commissioned economic advisory service Development Pathways to estimate some of the costs involved. Specifically, we modelled the costs of establishing child-sensitive social protection schemes in PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu, while also enhancing Fiji's existing social protection system by instituting a universal child benefit payment. Based on this modelling, the cost of ensuring universal social protection coverage for all children aged under 10 years (plus additional disability benefit payments for children and adults) was estimated at \$519.7m in Financial Year 2021-22, to be borne in the medium to long term by both national governments and donors, albeit with the assistance of an initial investment by donors alone. For the last two years, we have updated this figure in line with CPI, drawing on Treasury CPI data in Treasury. "Federal Budget Paper No. 1: Budget Strategy and Outlook," 2022-23, p. 6. Available at: <https://budget.gov.au/2021-22/content/documents.htm>.

²⁶ United Nations. 2022. Annual Report 2022. United Nations General Assembly: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children. Retrieved from https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/annual_report_un_srsrg_vac_unga_2022.pdf

²⁷ For example, see comments from Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, included with DFAT. "Stepping-up Australia's Engagement with our Pacific Family." Available at: <https://dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/Pages/stepping-up-australias-pacific-engagement.aspx>.

²⁸ Save the Children, ChildFund Australia, Plan International and World Vision. "Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment in Ending Violence Against Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste," 2019. Available at: [https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/29d0e266-a7d2-4200-ae47-d5e46e34bc79/STC01615_Unseen-Unsafe-Report_Web-\(1\).pdf.aspx](https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/29d0e266-a7d2-4200-ae47-d5e46e34bc79/STC01615_Unseen-Unsafe-Report_Web-(1).pdf.aspx).

²⁹ Save the Children et al. "Unseen, Unsafe."

extremely high levels of violence against children in the Pacific.³⁰ The percentage of children aged 1-14 years who experienced violent discipline in the previous month³¹ was shockingly high. The highest levels of violence occurred in Kiribati (92%), Samoa (91%), Tonga (87%), Solomon Islands (86%), and Vanuatu (84%).³² Compared with the *Unseen, Unsafe* report findings, these results indicate an increase in violent discipline over the time of the of the pandemic.

Sexual violence against children in the Pacific is a significant concern, across the region 1 in 10 girls experienced sexual violence, however the rate was much higher in some Pacific countries. For example, 64% of women aged between 15 and 49 in the Solomon Islands reported they had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Of these women, 37% reported that they had been sexually abused when they were under the age of 15.³³ What is even more concerning, is though these rates are very high, they are likely to be much lower than the actual levels of sexual violence as it is often unreported due to shame, deeply entrenched cultural taboos, and lack of effective child protection systems.³⁴

Endemic violence produces deeply detrimental impacts for children and society at large. As the *Unseen, Unsafe* report outlines, children who suffer from violence generally experience poor health outcomes, impaired cognitive development and increased financial vulnerability. They also display anti-social and aggressive behaviour, often continuing the cycle of violence into the next generation.³⁵ In addition to these impacts, the economic costs of violence against children range between 3 and 8 per cent of global GDP, while the economic value of disability-adjusted life years lost to child abuse across East Asia and the Pacific is estimated at around US\$194 billion.³⁶

Despite clear evidence of the scale and gravity of the problem in this region, it had not been a big focus for policymakers before the pandemic. Now, however, there are positive signs that some governments are turning their attention towards violence against children. For example, in 2021, government representatives from 25 countries across East Asia and the Pacific met to discuss ways forward at the “INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children” conference, hosted online by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation.³⁷

Conference participants made welcome commitments to address the data gap that exists around violence against children in many countries in the region. Another positive development occurred in Solomon Islands where the Government agreed in 2022 to consider changing the Islanders’

30 UNICEF. 2022. Making it Count: Strengthening data and evidence to prevent and respond to violence against children in East Asia and the Pacific. Available at: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Making_It_Count.pdf

[¹] At time of survey.

31 At time of survey.

32 These findings are from UNICEF global databases, 2021, based on MICS, DHS and other nationally representative sources, 2008–2021. For Solomon Islands and Vanuatu the age range is 2-14 years.

33 Save the Children et al. “Unseen, Unsafe.”

34 Save the Children et al. “Unseen, Unsafe.”

35 See ChildFund Alliance, Save the Children, SOS Children’s Villages International, World Vision International, and Development Initiatives. “Counting Pennies: A Review of Official Development Assistance to End Violence Against Children,” 2017: p 5. Available at: https://www.worldvision.com.au/docs/default-source/publications/children/counting-pennies-report.pdf?sfvrsn=8c64f13c_4.

36 P. Perezniato, A. Montes, L. Langston, and S. Routier. “The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence Against Children,” ChildFund Alliance, 2014: p. 1. Available at <http://childfundalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ODI-PolicyBrief-The-cost-and-economic-impact-of-violence-against-children.pdf>. See also X. Fang et al, 2015. “The Burden of Child Maltreatment in the East Asia and Pacific Region,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 42: 146–162: p. 146.

37 See UNICEF. “East Asia and Pacific Countries Commit to Ending Violence Against Children During COVID-19 and Beyond,” 5 November 2021. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/east-asia-and-pacific-countries-commit-ending-violence-against-children-during-covid#:~:text=The%20five%20day%20conference%2C%20organized,partners%20to%20drive%20forward%20evidence%20D.>

Marriage Act (1945) to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 years from the current age of 15 years. If this law is passed, it would effectively prohibit child marriage in Solomon Islands.

In order to advance progress to end violence against children in the Pacific, we call for strengthened investment and the development of a child and youth specific policy marker to track funding and impact to advance child and youth issues.

Without such markers in Australia to date, our own estimate is that in the Pacific and Timor Leste in 2017, Australia invested only \$1.1 million in programs specifically designed to end violence against children, while collectively, the major ODA donors invested only \$3.4 million. Even if the funding lens is broadened to take in programs that include some activities related to ending violence against children, Australia still only invested \$55 million – or 4.8 per cent of ODA to the region.

Adequate investment to end violence against children would provide critically needed resources to:

- Support parents and teachers to learn about and develop positive parenting and teaching practices that do not include violent punishment,
- enable the development of effective child protection systems that can respond to and support children who are victims of violence while holding those that harm children to account, and
- encourage progressive legislation required to protect children from all forms of corporal punishment including in the home or in schools.

For these reasons, Save the Children is calling for an additional \$65.22 million investment in funding for such programs over three years.³⁸

Budget Initiative	2023-24 (\$m)	2024-25 (\$m)	2025-26 (\$m)	Total (\$m)
Ending Violence Against Children	21.74	21.74	21.74	65.22

3. Increase Australia’s climate finance commitment to \$3bn over 2020-2025, commit an additional \$400 million to the Green Climate Fund by 2024 and allocate \$100 million to support loss and damage financing

The accelerating impacts of climate change are multiplying human security risks across the Indo-Pacific and Australia should act quickly to scale up its international response to these impacts. These impacts are especially devastating for children, as we highlight in our report, *Born into the Climate Crisis*.³⁹ According to an important study cited in our report and led by Wim Thiery of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, a child born in 2020 is projected to experience 2-13 times more extreme events during their lifetime than a person born in 1960.⁴⁰

Further, while the increased risks associated with climate change are generational, the worst conditions are found in developing countries, in reverse correlation with their responsibility for creating the climate crisis. This is because while the top 50 per cent of states ranked by income are responsible for 86 per cent of cumulative global carbon dioxide emissions, the lower half are responsible for only 14 per cent. Despite this disparity, the children of these low- and middle-income countries will be burdened with greater losses and damage to health and human capital, land,

³⁸ While we first called for \$55 million in our 2020-21 Budget Submission, we have updated this figure in line with CPI, drawing on ABS and Treasury CPI data as outlined in Budget Paper 1.

³⁹ Save the Children. “Born into the Climate Crisis: Why We Must Act Now to Secure Children’s Rights,” 2021. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/born-climate-crisis>.

⁴⁰ Refer to Thierry, Wim, Stefan Lange *et al.* “Intergenerational Inequities in Exposure to Climate Extremes.” *Science* 374: 6564, 2021: pp. 158-160.

cultural heritage, Indigenous and local knowledge, and biodiversity than their counterparts in wealthier nations. They will experience increased exposure to wildfires, crop failures and droughts, flooding from rivers and seas, and heatwaves. The impacts will also continue to be even worse for those exposed to multiple hazards such as conflict or displacement, COVID-19, and sharpening inequality and/or discrimination.⁴¹

Australia is surrounded by low- and middle-income countries across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, many of which are already experiencing enormous disruption to livelihoods, education, health outcomes, and community life in general. As Australia and its partners invest in ever more complex defence and security ties to protect the maritime routes and passes through the seas and oceans of the Indo-Pacific, so too should Australia and its partners invest in the human security of surrounding communities threatened by climate change. The frequency and intensity of disasters is accelerating across the region, as witnessed in recent months, when rising sea levels have exacerbated the impacts of tsunamis and cyclones.

Dealing with such climate-related challenges is only adding to the problem of declining development trajectories across the region, a trend which is further exacerbated by the economic and health crises generated by the pandemic on communities and households. The region's confidence, which has resulted especially from Asian populations' rise out of poverty over the last four decades, is already battered due to up to 150 million people potentially being pushed back into extreme poverty by present economic conditions.⁴² In addition, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that the impacts of climate change could drive a further 122 million people into extreme poverty by 2030.⁴³ Such significant challenges, which can only compound the difficulties faced by households seeking to relocate away from the worst impacts of climate change, are driving social, political, and economic changes that Australia is not yet in a position to anticipate.

Yet, limiting warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels will reduce the additional lifetime exposure of new-borns to heatwaves by 45 per cent, droughts by 39 per cent, river floods by 38 per cent, crop failures by 28 per cent, and wildfire by 10 per cent.⁴⁴ These differences will allow more children to access their rights to services, to meet basic needs, to participate in decision-making, and to a future. As our report points out, leadership in climate action on the part of high-income countries most responsible for climate change, particularly for financing and adaptation, will also yield multiple social, environmental, and economic returns: investment of \$1.8 trillion globally in five key areas of adaptation over a period of ten years could generate \$7.1 trillion in total net benefits.⁴⁵

Australia has been an active player in regional and global multilateral forums aimed at establishing global climate finance goals, including COP15, which established a US\$100 billion goal for global climate finance per year by 2020. This goal is a critical component of the 2015 Paris Agreement and is the result of many years of advocacy from low-income countries. Commendably, Australia has

⁴¹ Save the Children. "Born into the Climate Crisis: Why We Must Act Now to Secure Children's Rights," 2021. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/born-climate-crisis>.

⁴² World Bank, 2020. "COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 million Extreme Poor by 2021," Press Release 7 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/07/covid-19-to-add-as-many-as-150-million-extreme-poor-by-2021#:~:text=The%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic%20is,severity%20of%20the%20economic%20contraction..>

⁴³ Refer to UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. "Climate Action – Our Food Security Depends on it Now More than Ever Before," 2018. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/climate-change/news/detail/en/c/1158905/>.

⁴⁴ Global Commission on Adaptation. "Adapt Now: A Global Call for Leadership on Climate Resilience." Available at: [https://gca.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Global Commission Report FINAL.pdf](https://gca.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Global_Commission_Report_FINAL.pdf).

⁴⁵ Global Commission on Adaptation. "Adapt Now."

also committed to the equal distribution of finance between climate mitigation and climate adaptation, and to delivering finance through grants rather than loans.⁴⁶ Further, Australia played a key role in establishing the multilateral Green Climate Fund (GCF), committing to advocate for it to take an active interest in Pacific nations, and contributing \$200 million to it from 2015-2020. **In that regard we also note and encourage the Australian government in its bid to host the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change COP in 2026 in partnership with Pacific neighbours, a move that will send a positive message of support to countries disproportionately impacted by climate change.**

Additionally, we call upon the government to stand in support of Vanuatu and 17 other countries in their groundbreaking efforts to have the International Court of Justice (ICJ), via a resolution of the UN General Assembly, provide legal clarification to governments around the world regarding their responsibilities to protect future generations from the impacts of climate change. **Australia should back the resolution of the UN General Assembly and indeed encourage other governments to do likewise. An overwhelming majority of states supporting the resolution would signal international determination to tackle the threat of climate change and advance a human-rights based approach to the climate crisis.**

Overall, however, Australia's cash commitments have fallen short of its rhetoric, and in addition to disengaging from the GCF after its initial round of investment (the only contributor country to do so), it is currently near the bottom of global rankings for financing commitments and broader climate action.⁴⁷ Australia should therefore immediately increase its climate finance commitment to \$3 billion over the 2020-2025 period. Australia should also commit to re-engaging with the GCF through its current replenishment process, committing in 2023 at least \$400 million. Australia's re-engagement with the GCF is essential as it is the primary global climate finance mechanism with a proven track record of delivering large scale finance to priority issues, including in the Pacific. Further, all Indo-Pacific countries are engaged with GCF and see it as the principal vehicle for the provision of climate finance, while Australia's previous engagement with the fund was instrumental in ensuring significant flows of GCF finance reached our region. A new commitment of \$400 million would place Australia in line with other donors to the fund, which have all doubled their previous commitments.

With the agreement, at COP27, to develop a mechanism to channel finance aimed at addressing the loss and damage faced by developing countries, Australia should join other countries (including New Zealand) in making an early allocation of funds. In line with our historic emissions and GDP, Australia should commit at least \$100 million to the loss and damage mechanism. This commitment should be new and additional to Australia's existing climate finance allocation.

Budget Initiative	2023-24 (\$m)	2024-25 (\$m)	2025-26 (\$m)	Total (\$m)
Climate Finance (total increase)	333.3	333.3	333.3	1,000
Green Climate Fund	200	200		400
Loss and Damage	100			100

⁴⁶ DFAT. "Climate Change Action Strategy," 2021. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/climate-change-action-strategy>.

⁴⁷ Climate Action Tracker. "Australia Country Summary," 2021. Available at: <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/>.

4. Increase Australia's humanitarian funding allocation to \$1.15 billion in response to increased and intensified need, and more complex emergencies

Global Humanitarian Overview shows that in 2023, a record high 339 million people need humanitarian assistance, up from 274 million at beginning of 2022.⁴⁸ That is more than the entire population of the United States and means 1 in every 23 people need emergency assistance to survive. Behind these figures are some disturbing trends. More than one per cent of the world's population — or 103 million people — are now displaced. Two thirds of refugees and asylum-seekers originate from countries with food crises. The food insecurity and hunger crisis continue to unfold, driven by a deadly combination of conflict, climate shocks and the impending global recession. At least 222 million people across 53 countries are expected to face acute food insecurity and need urgent assistance. The impact on children is devastating; worldwide there are over 13.6 million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, one of the leading killers of children under five. Beyond the impact on their health, food insecurity puts children at heightened risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse, as many are forced to drop out of school, risk family separation, and are vulnerable to recruitment or use by armed groups. Girls are particularly vulnerable to early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, school dropout, sexual exploitation, and abuse.

Violent conflict is also increasing, taking a heavy toll on civilians. According to Stop the War on Children: The Forgotten Ones, 22 children are killed or injured in conflict every day. With one in six children living in a conflict zone worldwide, urgent action is needed to protect them from violence, and to ensure their humanitarian needs are met. Humanitarian responses in many of these conflicts affected countries are severely underfunded; in the 10 worst conflict affected countries to be a child, humanitarian response plans were on average only 43 per cent funded.⁴⁹

The dramatic rise in humanitarian need has been met with an increased cost of response, which in 2023 is US\$51.5 billion, a 25% increase in cost compared to the beginning of 2022.⁵⁰ Rising operational costs, commodity prices, and high inflation in 2023 has contributed to this rise, for example, the World Food Program's monthly food procurement costs are now 44% higher than before the pandemic. Save the Children recommends that Australia increases its humanitarian funding allocation towards meeting its fair share, which is AUD\$1.15 billion. While this represents a significant increase from the current allocation, Save the Children recommends Australia makes progress towards this target and plays its role in addressing global crises.

As part of the humanitarian funding allocation, Save the Children seeks additional funding for DFAT to enable a doubling of the Humanitarian Emergency Fund from \$150 million to \$300 million annually. This would mean that critical funding of \$150 million to urgently address food insecurity in hunger hotspots would be available in addition to funding for sudden onset disasters. While immediate funds are needed to save lives now, funding is most effective when it is invested in preventative measures that aim to strengthen and adapt systems and build resilience. A further investment of \$200 million annually over three years is required to address the root causes of hunger and invest in anticipatory action to prevent a resurgence of hunger and famine like conditions. Humanitarian funding should be multi-year, and have flexible arrangements that enable recipient organisations to respond effectively and efficiently, as per commitments in the Grand

⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2023. Available at: <https://humanitarianaction.info/gho2023>

⁴⁹ Save the Children, Stop the War on Children: the forgotten ones, November 2022. Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/stop-the-war-on-children-the-forgotten-ones.pdf/>

⁵⁰ The Global Humanitarian Overview is calculated by the United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs, and is always in USD. GHO 2023 was AUD\$75.75billion

Bargain.⁵¹ Funding should be channelled as close to the “frontline” as possible, and promote a localised response.

Budget Initiative	2023-24 (\$b)	Total (\$b)
Humanitarian Funding	\$1.15	\$1.15

5. Additional funding for humanitarian resettlement, repatriation of Australians from Syria and Education Cannot Wait replenishment

Strengthening Australia’s humanitarian resettlement program

Last year, over 100 million people were displaced, a record the United Nations said should never have been set. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported the fifteenth straight annual increase in people displaced within their countries, driven largely by conflict, while the number of refugees rose in one year from 26 million to 27.1 million, around half of them children.

Australia has a reputation as a successful multicultural nation, and as a generous provider to those in need. Save the Children is pleased to see the Department indicating that it aims to “progressively increase Australia’s intake”. Australia’s overall annual intake is currently 13,750, with an additional 16,500 places over the next four years reserved for Afghan refugees. The Government’s aspirations are positive and should be commended, particularly the commitment to expand the humanitarian program progressively. However, Australia’s intake at present is substantially lower than comparative countries and is out of step with the rate of displacement occurring globally.

The Danish Refugee Council projects that there will be an additional 4.1 million displaced individuals in 2023, with a total increase of 8.7 million people displaced between 2021 and 2023. To better reflect our values as a nation and our responsibility as a global actor, Save the Children recommends expanding the scale of humanitarian intake to 30,000 places, in addition to the community sponsorship program, to meet the rapidly rising global humanitarian needs and contributing Australia’s fair share to address the global displacement crisis.

Provide support to urgently ensure the repatriation of Australians from North East Syria

The Australian government should be commended for their efforts to repatriate thirteen Australian children, and four Australian women from North East Syria in October 2022. For almost four years, the children have been trapped in squalid camps, where many of them were living in uninsulated tents in extreme weather, with limited access to nourishing food, no formal schooling and inadequate healthcare. Save the Children acknowledges the complexity of extracting the Australians from the camps, returning them to Australian shores, and working with the NSW State Government to provide a range of support services as they embark upon a long journey of healing and resettlement. Funding should be allocated at federal and state levels to ensure the remaining Australian women and children are repatriated from North East Syria as a matter of urgency.

Invest in children’s education through an Education Cannot Wait (ECW) replenishment

New estimates from ECW, the UN’s global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises, show that 222 million school-aged children are affected by crises globally, which is a significant increase from 2016 (75 million).⁵² Approximately 78.2 million are out of school, with 120 million in

⁵¹ The Grand Bargain: Agenda for Humanity is an agreement from the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 in which governments and humanitarian organisations committed to reform the delivery of humanitarian aid.

⁵² Education Cannot Wait, Global Estimates: Number of crisis-affected children and adolescents in need of education support, June 2022. Available at: <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/resource-library/global-estimates-number-crisis-affected-children-and-adolescents-in-need-education>.

school but not achieving minimum proficiency in mathematics or reading.⁵³ A further 24.2 million are in pre-primary school or in primary or secondary school achieving minimum proficiency in mathematics or reading, but still affected by crises and in need of support.⁵⁴

Despite this, education in emergencies and protracted crises remains underfunded globally, including in the Pacific, where disasters have led to a significant increase in children not attending school. As the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction has noted, investing in safe schools provides economic returns for society and contributes to economic recovery. The Australian Government's commitment to disaster risk reduction in the Pacific, including through its implementation of the Sendai Framework, and support for education in the Pacific acknowledges the value in combatting these issues.

ECW's investment modalities have the capacity to deliver rapidly at scale, whilst also ensuring quality and sustainability. ECW has expanded its strategic focus to include responding to climate change as a key part of education in emergencies and protracted crises, including a regional focus on the Indo Pacific. Alongside a further financial commitment to ECW, the Australian Government will have the opportunity to meaningfully inform how ECW will implement this strategic priority, which will have particular relevance to the Australian Government's focus on climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction and response in the Pacific and South East Asia.

Budget Initiative	2023-24 (\$m)	2024-2025 (\$m)	2025-26	Total (\$m)
Education Cannot Wait replenishment	8	8	8	24

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Key Recommendations – Australian

1. Contribute \$14.6 million over four years to engage children at risk of disengaging from school

Disengagement from learning is widespread across Australia, yet has consistently received little attention from governments relative to the significant harm it causes. Even before COVID-19, Australia's high rate of disengagement could fairly be described as a national crisis, given the lifelong adverse impacts of educational disengagement for individuals and society as a whole.

COVID-19 threatens to turn this significant existing problem into a generational rupture. The pandemic has disrupted children's learning, weakened their connection to schools, placed severe pressure on their mental health and wellbeing, and significantly increased disengagement. All parents have seen these impacts on their children to varying degrees, and there is increasing broader awareness of the scale and 'long tail' of the problem as children continue to struggle to adjust to the years of social, emotional and academic learning that they have lost and to engage, or re-engage, with learning.

This is a national problem that requires a national approach and solution.

The Australian Government has an established national leadership role working with the States and Territories on important school education policy areas, and has responsibility for primary mental health care. It is also responsible for the national economy and economy-wide policy decisions. This is significant because educational disengagement has significant implications for Australia's future productivity and fiscal position, especially with the impact of COVID-19.

The Australian Government has a clear mandate and unique capacity to take a leadership role in addressing school disengagement at a national level, especially in responding to COVID-19. There is ample scope for this to be done without intruding on States' role as school system managers, seeking to dictate how States manage school systems, or impinging on existing State activities.

We believe there would be significant value in developing a **national strategy to keep students engaged with learning** to avert the looming social and economic costs of Australia's national education disengagement crisis. As one element of this, **we propose a strategic investment by the Australian government in Hands on Learning, to make this evidence-based program available at 380 schools across Australia for schools and students who need it.**

Hands on Learning builds at-risk students' connection to school and their community by engaging them in practical, hands-on activities that are meaningful to them and their schools and communities, increasing their sense of connection and belonging with an explicit focus on teaching, building and measuring social and emotional skills development. Participants are students who are at risk of disengagement.

Established in 1999 and refined, developed and expanded over the last 23 years, Hands on Learning is currently being implemented by 140 partner school sites across Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania. The program continued operating throughout the lockdowns and remote learning requirements of the pandemic, responding to the particular challenges that those requirements – and the broader wellbeing impacts of the pandemic – created for student engagement, particularly for students already at risk of disengagement.

A 2022 analysis by Dandolo Partners highlighted that 95 per cent of Hands on Learning participants finish school or get an apprenticeship or a job. It found that Hands on Learning 'meets a clear need', 'is grounded in evidence and demonstrates a commitment to measuring impact' and has a

‘very low threshold for investment in the program to break even and to deliver a positive return on investment. If only 1.1% of their annual cohort finish school when they wouldn’t have otherwise, they break even.’

Aggregated Hands on Learning parent data 2018-2022, representing over 1000 parents across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania, found consistent strong parent responses with 77 per cent of parents identifying Hands on Learning as the key reason their child is more engaged and motivated to attend school, 90 per cent saying the program plays a vital role in supporting their child’s wellbeing and 87 per cent reporting that since being in the program, their child is happier at school.

In light of this, we propose the below investment to develop, scale and support schools to implement Hands on Learning in every State and Territory across Australia.

Budget Initiative	2024 (\$m)	2025 (\$m)	2026 (\$m)	2027 (\$m)	Total (\$m)
Hands on Learning	\$2.009	\$3.279	\$4.484	\$4.828	\$14.600

* These figures are expressed in calendar years to align with school year (calendar year) funding cycles, but we are able to provide specific financial year figures if needed, depending on the timing of relevant decisions by government.

2. Provide \$7.05 million over two years to provide school-based wellbeing support in flood-affected communities across South East Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW

Children across Australia have experienced significant major disasters in recent years. These are likely to have long-lasting adverse effects unless children’s recovery is effectively supported. We are working with the National Emergency Management Agency and other Federal Government agencies to share our insights into where there is particular need for support, and how these needs are evolving, based on our on-the-ground experience responding to these disasters.

One stand-out region is the parts of the east coast across South East Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW that experienced the catastrophic February-March 2022 floods and continue to feel the effects of that devastation. We have seen this first hand. Our local teams rapidly mobilised to deliver our disaster response and recovery program ‘Child Friendly Spaces’, directly supporting 50 children in South East Queensland in five days across three evacuation centres, as well as 138 children in Northern Rivers NSW in 21 days across five recovery and evacuation centres.

Without effective early intervention, children and young people experiencing collective trauma are much more likely to experience negative development effects and poor outcomes later in life. The February-March floods and their impact to date bear all the hallmarks of such longer-term harm. We estimate this includes around 50,993 children in South East Queensland and 12,353 in Northern Rivers NSW aged 5 to 14, who have been seriously impacted. Nearly one year on from the floods, these children have a pressing need for support.

Schools are an ideal site for providing this support. However, schools are already overburdened and lack the capacity to provide the support that is needed. In our experience, schools and their surrounding communities are urgently seeking appropriate external support that can be delivered in schools, in partnership with local communities, to support children’s recovery.

Accordingly, we propose to deliver our evidence-based, in school support program **Journey of Hope** across these affected regions. Based in cognitive-behavioural theory, Journey of Hope is an early intervention program for children and young people aged 4-18 who have had their safety, stability and learning undermined by a disaster or collective trauma experience.

Journey of Hope has a proven global track record supporting children who have experienced collective trauma. In Australia, we have rapidly scaled, delivered and evaluated the program in response to significant need in recent years, including in:

- 77 schools across regional NSW and Victoria in response to the 2019-20 'Black Summer' bushfires, successfully supporting 5,000 children over 18 months; and
- 12 schools and 4 early learning centres in Melbourne during 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 related lockdowns, successfully supporting almost 500 children over 4 months.

We are scaling Journey of Hope further over the next 24 months in bushfire, flood and COVID-19 affected communities across NSW's central and south coast and Melbourne, Sydney and Darwin in partnership with relevant Federal Government Departments, agencies and funded organisations.

Within the large cohort of affected children in South East Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW, certain communities and schools have a particular need for support, including those in the lowest quarter percentile for socio-economic advantage and those with higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Taking this into account, **we propose that Journey of Hope be delivered to priority schools in South East Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW to reach 10,800 students across 138 schools at a total cost of \$7.05m (average cost of around \$650 per child)**. This would target the four Local Government Areas of Brisbane, Logan, Moreton Bay and Redland (in Queensland) and the six Local Government Areas of Ballina, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed (in NSW).

More broadly, we note that there is significant unmet need for mental health and wellbeing support of the type provided by Journey of Hope across Australia, including to support children's recovery from:

- the major floods that continued to occur across 2022 and in early 2023, in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia; and
- the continuing and as yet largely unaddressed impacts of COVID-19.

While the proposed Budget initiative below relates only to the February-March 2022 floods in South East Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW, we are also in a position to rapidly scale and deliver Journey of Hope across other communities in response to local need and Australian Government priorities as required.

We also note there would be significant value in a broader grants program to support recovery and resilience following the multiple severe floods affecting Australian communities in 2022 and early 2023, which could be similar to the Australian Government's \$276m Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants Program.

Budget Initiative	2023-24 (\$m)	2024-25 (\$m)	2025-26 (\$m)	2026-27 (\$m)	Total (\$m)
Journey of Hope	3.525	3.525	-	-	\$7.05

* These figures and phasings are indicative and would be confirmed by agreement with government if the initiative proceeded.

3. Implement systemic reforms needed to set up the long term success of Australia's social and economic trajectory by making children a national policy priority

As noted earlier in this submission, Australia's social and economic trajectory depends on how this generation of children recovers from the extraordinary pressures they have faced in recent years, and will continue to face in the years ahead, as the effects of COVID-19 continue to be felt.

To address these generational challenges, we recommend that the Australian Government make children – of all ages from birth to 18 – a national policy priority. This should be immediately pursued through a National Children's COVID-19 Recovery Plan to establish policies and significant investment to address the social and economic dimensions of children's recovery in the short, medium and long term, which could lay the foundation for a longer-term National Children's Plan.

In this submission, we have proposed two specific, costed initiatives – relating to supporting children's post-disaster wellbeing and their engagement with education – that we believe should be particular priorities and are ready to deliver 'off the shelf'. In addition, we wish to highlight other crucial systemic reforms that we would strongly welcome being advanced in the next Budget.

Ensure the Early Years Strategy strongly drives improved equity

We welcome the Government's commitment to developing a Commonwealth Early Years Strategy that is integrated, holistic and whole-of-government in nature. The critical importance of children's early years for their lifelong development is increasingly well recognised. To date, however, Australian governments' investments in the early years have lacked a specific focus on improved equity. The result is that too many children continue to miss out, as evident in the persistent inability of jurisdictions to achieve genuinely universal participation in early childhood education, and the persistent high rates of children reaching school developmentally vulnerable. Those missing out are disproportionately those facing the greatest existing disadvantage.

We recommend that the Early Years Strategy adopt a strong focus on improved equity, with a particular focus on targeting support and interventions to children and families facing the greatest disadvantage, and ensuring that services directed at them are evidence-informed and able to reach, engage and effectively support the children and families who most need it.

Raise the rate of income support above the poverty line

Children do best when they grow up in families that are able to meet their developmental needs, including providing the material basics of food, shelter, clean clothes, medical care and educational necessities. Yet too many Australian families lack the means to provide these basics for their children, and are faced with an impossible struggle to get by while relying on income supports that are far below the poverty line.

We recommend that the Australian Government raise the rate of income support above the poverty line, as urged by experts including the Australian Council of Social Service and others, and recognise the particular difference this would make to addressing child poverty in Australia.

Recognise children's experiences of domestic and family violence in their own right

Children are the hidden victims and survivors of domestic and family violence. Domestic and family violence damages children's health, wellbeing, learning and development. It undermines the most fundamental foundations for a child's life, including their family, their relationships, their housing and their safety – often traumatically. Yet Australian governments' current responses are failing to address these significant breaches of children's rights. Children are all but invisible in domestic and family violence policy and services.

We recommend that the implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* include a much stronger focus, and additional investment, to recognise and respond to children's experiences of domestic and family violence in their own right.

Take a national leadership role in youth justice

Across Australia, children's rights are being systematically breached by youth justice systems and the policies and laws that underpin them, in detention settings and at every stage of contact with youth justice. It is clear that existing approaches are not working and State and Territory Governments are not making the reforms that are needed. There is a strong argument that the scale of the problem, and some of the levers required to address it effectively, are national.

We recommend that the Australian Government take a national leadership role in youth justice, including in developing enforceable national standards for youth justice that meet child rights requirements, and in relation to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 in all Australian jurisdictions.

Invest in mechanisms to support children's voices to be heard and taken seriously

Children are largely not prioritised in decisions made by governments and other institutions about them, and they know it. This has been very clear during the pandemic, where decisions about school closures and remote learning, which by their nature most directly affect children, have been made largely without specific consideration of their impact on children themselves. Children want, and deserve, to be heard. When children are involved and participating in civic life and decisions affecting them, everyone benefits. In the case of government decision-making, meaningful children's participation leads to better policies and more effective implementation, in addition to the direct benefits for children themselves and their communities flowing from such participation.

We recommend that the Australian Government build on its existing and welcome progress in establishing a new youth engagement model and associated initiatives, by developing a national agenda for the participation and civic engagement of children and young people of all ages from their early years to aged 18 and beyond.

Strongly support the establishment of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament

Save the Children welcomes the commitment from the Federal Government to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart (Uluru Statement) and its role in playing a key component of First Nations policy. The Uluru Statement is a call for Australians to walk together to build a better future by establishing a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution, and the establishment of a Makarrata Commission for the purpose of treaty making and truth-telling. We also welcome the commitment to hold a referendum to enshrine a First Nations Voice in the Constitution in this current term of Parliament.

It is critical that the design of the Voice to Parliament involves consultation and cooperation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, including children, to the fullest extent possible.⁵⁵ This position is centred within Australia's international human rights commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has recognised that special measures through legislation and policies for the protection of Indigenous

⁵⁵ Save the Children, Submission, "Indigenous Voice", National Indigenous Australians Agency, 30 April 2021. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/3575ed12-5b56-4b89-8e3d-510f78087093/indigenous-voice.pdf.aspx>

children should be undertaken in consultation with communities and with the participation of children in the consultation process, as provided for by Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As part of the funding set aside to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart,⁵⁶ resources should be dedicated to ensuring that the views of First Nations children are obtained in a culturally appropriate manner.

Recommended Offset Measures

To fund commitments that support our recommendations, the Australian Government should commit to withdrawing support for federal subsidies for fossil fuel industries and cease to provide any ODA, foreign investment, export credit, or trade promotion that supports fossil fuel extraction. In 2021-22, the Australian Government allocated \$11.6 billion in federal subsidies to fossil fuel industries, a significant contrast with its ODA allocation of \$4.65 billion in total.⁵⁷ Globally, the International Monetary Fund estimates that the global fossil fuel industry benefits from \$5.9 trillion a year (or \$11 million a minute) in public subsidies, including direct support from government and indirect costs paid by government for the impact of fossil fuel emissions on health and the environment.⁵⁸

Australia should play its part, by withdrawing these subsidies and contribute towards protecting children from the impacts of fossil fuel burning. Air pollution has been shown to increase the risk of pre-term birth and growth restriction in children.⁵⁹ Further, more than 90 per cent of children globally are exposed to fine particulate matter every day, in concentrations that exceed World Health Organisation guidelines. This exposure can lead to increased risk of lung damage, impaired lung growth, and pneumonia – one of the biggest killers of children.⁶⁰ It negatively impacts the right to life and to the right to health under Articles 6 and 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Australian government should implement minimum standards for consulting with children about climate policy and legislation, ensuring that children are always consulted and provided clear guidance about when and how it happens.⁶¹ Such consultation should incorporate consideration of whether policies are sufficient for limiting warming beneath 1.5° Celsius and the rapid phase out fossil fuels as part of commitments towards the goals of the Paris Agreement.

⁵⁶ As noted in the Budget October 2022-23, \$75.1 million will be provided to prepare for the delivery of a referendum to enshrine a First Nations Voice to Parliament in the Constitution. \$5.8 million has been allocated to fund the first step of funding to establish an independent Makarrata Commission: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/news-centre/niaa/budget-october-2022-23-national-indigenous-australians-agency>.

⁵⁷ See Alia Armistead, Rod Campbell, Eliza Littleton and Sienna Parrott, “Fossil Fuel Subsidies in Australia: Federal and State Government Assistance to Fossil Fuel Producers and Major Users, 2021-22,” The Australia Institute, March 2022. Available at: <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/fossil-fuel-subsidies-in-australia-2021-22/>.

⁵⁸ International Monetary Fund, ‘Fossil Fuel Subsidies’: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/climate-change/energy-subsidies>.

⁵⁹ The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. “Air Pollution and Pregnancy,” 2021. Available at: <https://ranzocog.edu.au/womenshealth/patient-information-guides/patientinformation-pamphlets/air-pollutionand-pregnancy>.

⁶⁰ World Health Organisation. “Air Pollution and Child Health: Prescribing Clean Air,” 2018. Available at: from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/air-pollution-and-childhealth>.

⁶¹ Save the Children, “ARISE AND ACT: Our Future is on Fire”, by Australian children and young people, 2022. Available at: https://www.savethechildren.org.au/getmedia/7db499d8-b51d-48ca-b9cb-9b75aa364ded/arise-and-act_sc1.pdf.aspx. Save the Children, “Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis”, 2022. Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Generation-Hope-Report-GLOBAL-online-version-25-10-22.pdf/>.