

Media Update

7 December 2023

Only half of young people able to identify correct definition of climate change – UNICEF, Gallup

Findings highlight urgent need to protect and invest in children, including in climate education, in decisions at COP28

NEW YORK/DUBAI, 7 December 2023 – Most children and young people say they have heard of climate change but only half understand what it is, according to a new UNICEF-Gallup poll, as world leaders gather at this year’s COP28.

The global poll found that on average, 85 per cent of young people aged 15-24 surveyed in 55 countries said they have heard of climate change, yet just 50 per cent of those chose the correct definition as per the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) when asked to select between “seasonal changes in weather that occur every year” and “more extreme weather events and a rise in average world temperatures resulting from human activity”.

“Young people have been some of the biggest heroes in driving action to address the impact of climate change. They have been calling for climate action on the streets or in meeting rooms, and we need to do even more to ensure that all children and young people understand the crisis that hangs over their future,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. “At COP28, leaders must commit to ensuring that children and young people are educated on the problem, considered in discussions, and engaged in decisions that will shape their lives for decades to come.”

Climate change knowledge among young people was found to be lowest in lower-middle- and low-income countries – those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change - such as Pakistan (19 per cent), Sierra Leone (26 per cent) and Bangladesh (37 per cent).

According to [The Children’s Climate Risk Index](#), published by UNICEF in 2021, children in all three countries are classified as at extremely high risk of the

impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, threatening their health, education, and protection, and exposing them to deadly diseases.

The global poll – a follow-up to the initial [Changing Childhood Project](#) in 2021 – analyzes results from UNICEF’s subset of 2023 Gallup World Poll questions. Alongside climate change, it explores two long-term challenges shaping the lives of children and young people – trust in information, and constraints on political change in a globalized world.

When it comes to trust in information, the results show that 60 per cent of young people surveyed use social media as their primary source of news and information, yet only 23 per cent have a lot of trust in information on those platforms. In fact, social media is the least trusted information source across all institutions in the poll.

In line with the initial Changing Childhood findings, the data reflects how globalization is impacting this generation, with 27 per cent of young respondents identifying as citizens of the world – higher than any other age group polled.

The more expansive worldview the poll identifies among the younger generation may offer hope for more cross-border alliances and collaboration on the climate crisis, eroding trust, and other global problems.

“This research offers valuable insights into how children and young people see three long-term challenges shaping our world—now and in the future,” said Joe Daly, senior partner at Gallup. “Highlighting the perspectives of young people is crucial. It helps today’s policy makers understand the needs and views of rising generations in an era of rapid change and uncertainty.”

In August, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child affirmed the children’s right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, following the recognition of the UN General Assembly in July 2022 that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right. The guidance explicitly addressed the climate emergency, the collapse of biodiversity and pervasive pollution, and outlined countermeasures to protect the lives and life perspectives of children.

Despite these rights, ratified by 196 states under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that children are among those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, children are largely disregarded in the decisions

made to address the climate crisis, meaning their unique vulnerabilities, needs and contributions are often overlooked.

At the COP28 Climate Change Summit, underway in Dubai, UNICEF is calling on world leaders to ensure decisions deliberately protect and invest in children, including in climate education. This includes:

- Elevating children within the final COP28 Cover Decision and convening an expert dialogue on children and climate change.
- Embedding children and intergenerational equity in the Global Stocktake (GST).
- Including children and climate-resilient essential services within the final decision on the Global Goal for Adaptation (GGA).
- Ensuring the Loss and Damage Fund and funding arrangements are child-responsive, with child rights embedded in the fund's governance and decision-making process.

Beyond COP28, UNICEF is calling on parties to take action to protect the lives, health and well-being of children - including by adapting essential social services, empowering every child to be a champion for the environment, and fulfilling international sustainability and climate change agreements, including rapidly reducing emissions.

“Having witnessed the power of the youth climate movement, I am confident that informing and engaging even more young people around the climate crisis could help turbocharge the collective sense of urgency the world so desperately needs,” added Russell.

#####

Notes to Editors:

- Access the full set of data from the survey, methodology and the project report at this [interactive platform](#), available in 10 languages
- Photos, b-roll and other multimedia assets are available <https://weshare.unicef.org/Package/2AM408LDCPL8>

- UNICEF is at COP28 with senior spokespeople and children and youth who are available for interview. Please contact Tess Ingram, details below.

The 55 countries surveyed in UNICEF-Gallup 2023 World Poll are: Afghanistan, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

The poll is the second installation of [The Changing Childhood Project](#), the first survey of its kind to ask multiple generations for their views on the world and what it is like to be a child today. [Following a 2021 survey](#) of 21,000 people in 21 countries, this 2022-2023 survey reached more than 55,000 people in 55 countries – including the 21 countries surveyed for the first Changing Childhood Project – as part of Gallup's World Poll. Nationally representative surveys were undertaken in countries across all regions and income levels. UNICEF and Gallup analyzed the data across four age groups: 15-24, 25-39, 40-64 and over 65.

For the youth cohort across the 55 countries: The median margin of error (MOE) for the 15–24-year-old cohort across all 55 countries is +/-7.6% (based on 95% confidence interval and testing a percentage of 50%, which gives the maximum MOE for a given sample size).

For more information, please contact:

Tess Ingram, UNICEF New York, tingram@unicef.org, +1 934 867 7867

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#)

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.