



unicef 

Office of Research-Innocenti

LEADING MINDS

for children and young people

**CONVENING
THE WORLD'S
LEADING
THINKERS**

To explore the
future of childhood

7-9 November 2019
Florence, Italy

UNICEF is focusing increasingly on convening and creating shared value partnerships to accelerate the pace of change for children.

OVERVIEW

2019 marks an important anniversary for children. Thirty years ago, for the first time in history, the world came together to put global standards for childhood at the heart of international law through the Convention on the Rights of Child — the most widely ratified treaty in human history.

That same year UNICEF and the Government of Italy established the Innocenti Research Centre in Florence — the world's first-ever centre of research dedicated solely to children's issues.

The year 2019 also marks the 600th anniversary of the Ospedale degli Innocenti – arguably the oldest institution of care and protection for children in the world – which to this day continues its progressive, humanist approach to childhood in the heart of Florence, Italy. This unique institute of early renaissance heritage is also home to UNICEF's research centre, now known as the Office of Research-Innocenti.

The decades since the Convention came into force have witnessed great strides for children. Under-five deaths have fallen by nearly 60 per cent, with tremendous progress in every region. More children are in school than ever before, and fewer are undernourished. Rates of child marriage have dropped, in some places dramatically. Most children now enjoy access to improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities. And in country after country, laws, policies and budgets have been enacted to safeguard and realize children's rights.

THE WORLD OF TODAY

The world of today presents vastly different challenges and opportunities for children, and for UNICEF, than it did in 1989. Advances in recent years have slowed alarmingly on several key issues such as learning and vaccination. Some regions and countries are falling sharply behind on a range of key issues of children's

THE 2019 LM CONFERENCE

HEALTHY MINDS, HEALTHY FUTURES

FOCUS AND FORMAT In its inaugural year, the Leading Minds conference will tackle issues related to the mental health of children and young people, which is becoming one of the most pressing challenges for them in the 21st century. The title of the conference will be **Healthy Minds, Healthy Futures**.

The conference will examine three priority areas on the mental health of children and young

people: the first decade of life; adolescence and youth; and the impact of a changing world on young minds. Throughout the focus will be on the scale of the challenge and the proven and promising solutions to meet it. The conference's final session will conclude with a deep dive into the pathways that global agents can take to tackle the issue of child and youth mental health.

DAY 1

Day 1 will consist of two substantial sessions that both examine **mental health for children and young people across the life cycle**.

After opening remarks, the morning will be devoted to examining the state-of-the-art evidence, and the corresponding programmatic and policy responses on children's mental health in the first decade of life, beginning in pregnancy, through the first five years, and then into middle childhood (5-9 years). Solid evidence exists on the vital importance of the first decade to mental health, whether it be the absence of childhood abuse or the imperative of stimulation and care.

The afternoon session of DAY 1 will follow a similar format, focusing on the second decade of life. This is the period when many of the mental health conditions prevalent in adulthood are first manifest, and also the most challenging time for those entrusted with the care and protection of young people to reach them with solutions. Adolescents and young people will make key interventions in this session, both in its moderation and in presenting first person evidence and recommendations.

DAY 2

After a brief recap of DAY 1, the morning session of DAY 2 will look at the **impact of a changing world on the mental health of children and young people**.

Emerging evidence is indicating that issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, unplanned and rapid urbanization, migration, demographic transition, youth unemployment, and technological leaps are having profound impacts on the minds of children and young people. All of these trends are continuing at pace, particularly in the developing world, but still far too little is understood about their impact on the brain health of the world's youngest citizens.

The afternoon of DAY 2 will take a deep dive for several hours into the potential response of key global agents of change to the evidence and policy recommendations presented. At present, there is no global movement, fund or programming for children's brain health. The conference aims to change this through the creation of a shared value partnership for the mental health of children and young people.

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rights ranging from access to skilled health personnel to violence in schools. Climate change threatens the future of all children. Rapid unplanned urbanization has left many of them living in slums. Millions of children are on the move, with many having been forcibly displaced from their homes and communities, often due to conflict. Many children and young people envisage a bleak future, with little hope of decent work as formal labor markets tighten.

On the other hand, the world has many of the tools and pathways to address these challenges. Technology presents unprecedented pathways to breaking long-standing barriers and bottlenecks. Multilateralism and multi-stakeholder partnerships hold the immense promise of finding new and lasting solutions for realizing child rights by exploiting the strengths of diverse partners. Research on children and young people is proliferating, greatly enhancing an understanding of the risks to and opportunities for childhood.

To tap the benefits of enhanced knowledge, technology and prosperity, UNICEF is focusing increasingly on convening and creating shared value partnerships to accelerate the pace of change for children. As part of that drive, we are launching a new annual conference: Leading Minds for Children and Young People, with an inaugural event on 7-9 November 2019 in Florence, Italy, hosted by our Office of Research-Innocenti.

The Leading Minds conference will be held annually. Each year, the conference will convene a specific deep-dive into a core theme selected as one of the most pressing issues facing the future of childhood. The conference will bring together a group of the world's leading thinkers — scholars, scientists, innovators, influencers, philanthropists, governments and young people — to discuss new evidence, pose bold questions and identify even bolder answers to current and future challenges, and create and catalyze shared valued partnerships.

PARTICIPANTS

Invitations for LM 2019 will be sent to a highly selective and relevant group of academics, business, civil society, government, international agencies, philanthropists, and young people, all in direct positions of power and influence. The focus will be on having intellectuals (scientists, economists, futurists, educators, epidemiologists, technologists) take the lead in presenting the evidence and policy recommendations, complemented by the lived experience and advocacy of young people themselves. Each LM conference will be developed with young people, who will also form around 40 per cent of the participants.

Leading agencies, foundations, philanthropists, donors and business will be invited to attend to listen, question and help co-create solutions, form partnerships and mobilize resources for the mental health of children and young people.

Invitations will be sent out in June to the participants, giving them sufficient lead time to confirm

participation and for the OoR to prepare those that accept for their respective roles in the conference.

FELLOWSHIPS

Engaging young people in significant and leading roles in the conference is imperative. The OoR has a unique proposition in this regard that aims to focus on using the Leading Minds conference to foster the next generation of young scholars, scientists, advocates, innovators and entrepreneurs. To that end, the conference organizers will work with country and regional offices, National Committees and partners to identify a cadre of young knowledge brokers, advocates and innovators to bring to Florence ahead of the conference and work on bringing an authentic youth perspective into the discussion. Specifically, these young people would function as moderators of plenary sessions and facilitators of breakout groups and discussion events.

The Young Leading Minds Fellows would be drawn from an interdisciplinary pool of researchers, scientists, entrepreneurs, advocates and innovators

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The conference would reflect the participation of young people and would also result in a Young Leading Minds Fellowship being established. This would be awarded to five young people, each from one of the world's major continents – Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania, - to follow up on the conference's action points and to further push forward with evidence generation and partnership building in their respective continents. The Young Leading Minds Fellows would be drawn from an interdisciplinary pool of researchers, scientists, entrepreneurs, advocates and innovators. Each would be awarded a bursary, supported by members of the Leading Minds conference. They would be based in Florence for six months, and then hosted by regional and country offices or National Committees as appropriate. Much like the Capstone, we would support and publish their work and findings.

Given that the first conference will be on mental health, the aim would be to attract young researchers from around the world whose work is focused on

this issue – and particularly those that are working on innovative issues and methodologies. The aim would be to identify key areas of investigation emerging from the LM conference for these researchers to explore, in conjunction with some of the scholastic participants, with research/ policy papers published within a year.

OUTCOMES

The aim is for every Leading Minds conference to end with a bold but achievable global ambition for children, with a set of partners committed to taking it forward. Each of the participants will be challenged to define how they contribute to the ambition, and how they will partner with others.

The outcomes of the conference will be synthesized into a report by the OoR to be approved by the DED Partnerships to inform regional and national policy shifts, bolster resource allocations and galvanize collective action.

Coupled with the powerful reach of UNICEF and influence of attending luminaries, the use of a diverse range of media channels at-and-after the conference will take the ideas and outcomes further still, influencing global audience circles and challenging to think differently and take action accordingly.

The conference will leverage new shared value partnerships with the private sector, donors and philanthropists to set strategic goals and funding priorities, based on sound research and evidence. It will prototype new ways of thinking and doing; informing new workshops, roundtables, Op Eds and action plans within and outside of UNICEF.

SPONSORSHIP/ DONATIONS

In line with the realities of a judicious environment for development cooperation, the Leading Minds Conference aims to become self financing. To this end, we have set up a sponsorship/donations platform for the conference. Sponsorship contributions are envisaged to be at \$250K or more, with \$100K apportioned to funding a Young Leading Minds Fellowship for a year. The remainder of the funds would support the conference arrangements, including dinners, luncheons and breakfasts; private meetings with UNICEF Executive Office; speaking roles; co-branding of selected events within the conference, and of the final conference report; and first offer of sponsorship to Leading Minds 2020. Further details of the sponsorship modality are available from the Office of Research-Innocenti on request. ■

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Convening today's
biggest thinkers
to pioneer tomorrow's
brightest childhoods

for every child, **answers**