ON THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF CHILD IDENTITY

As a child grows and develops, so does their sense of identity. Science underscores the vital importance of the formative years of life in shaping our life-long identities. Those children who form a positive identity in childhood have a higher probability of educational and career advancement, increased lifetime earnings and greater chances of good mental health – while the opposite is often true of those who face discrimination, exclusion and violence on the basis of identity characteristics such as their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, migratory status, disability and other facets.

This makes child identity a compelling topic for UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight to explore through its Leading Minds Conference series, which is co-hosted with the Government of Italy. The conference’s 2022 edition, which will be held on 2-4 November in Florence, will unpack the issue of child identity in a rapidly changing world. Not only are children dealing with traditional issues related to identity, include those related to sex, gender, race, disability, and socioeconomic status, among others; they are also having to navigate new identity challenges presented by the online world, the so-called ‘culture wars’ prevalent in societies across the world, and threats ranging from radicalization to escalating economic insecurity and the climate crisis.

Through a blend of plenary talks, moderated discussions, breakout workshops and peer-group engagement, Leading Minds 2022 will examine child identity from diverse perspectives, seeking to ask and answer the following questions:

- How are children and young people affected by identity challenges in a changing world?
- How can understanding identity better protect children from harm, abuse and exploitation?
- How is the online world shaping child identity?
- Why does child identity matter for government policy and humanitarian action?
- How can we translate our evidence and experience into community and youth-led practice?
- What actions are needed to lift child identity into greater importance in the international agenda?

Leading Minds 2022 will close with a Clarion Call for eliminating discrimination, exclusion and violence based on identity, and for supporting children and young people to build their own positive identities. The debates and conclusions of Leading Minds 2022 will feed into a final report on child identity that will form the base for future actions in support of child identity by UNICEF and its partners.