

BORN INTO THE CLIMATE CRISIS 2



AN
UNPRECEDENTED LIFE:
**PROTECTING
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**
IN A CHANGING
CLIMATE

– CHILDREN
& YOUNG
PEOPLE'S
REPORT




Save the Children

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"I'm here today to tell you that we have had enough. We have had enough of missed days and weeks of school or work, no power for weeks, having to be displaced due to rising sea levels, food insecurity because crops have been wiped out by cyclones or droughts."

– Gabrielle, 15 years old from Vanuatu

"Our future is at stake, and we must be part of the decisions that shape it."

– Children from Pakistan

Behind the scenes: how children and youth shaped this report

This report has been developed with the support of a dedicated child reference group, comprised of 28 children aged between 11 and 18 years old from Colombia, Vanuatu, New Zealand, Ukraine, Albania, Sierra Leone, China and Yemen, to outline how the intergenerational impacts of the climate crisis are infringing on children's rights. We thank all the children who helped shape this report – and all child advocates for climate action globally – for their time, thoughtful recommendations, and continued commitment to defending the rights of children in the face of a climate crisis that is not of their own making. The report also features children's statements and experiences of climate change and economic inequality obtained through Save the Children's consultations with 58,000 children from 46 countries in 2022ⁱ and hundreds of children meaningfully engaged in climate advocacy and campaigning from 20 countries in 2024ⁱⁱ.

Protectem Mifala Vanuatu Pikinini
Protect Us, the Children of Vanuatu

Poem by Haruka, 16 year old girl from Vanuatu

*I remember being a little girl,
hearing the wind slam the door,
watching our coconut tree fall lifeless.
I was scared, scarred.
But in a developing Pacific nation,
I was privileged.*

*I can't imagine the children without doors,
whose every thought is survival,
bearing the brunt of a crisis
they did the least to create.*


*The little girl I was thought it was normal—
storms were just life in Vanuatu,
'One of the most vulnerable places to disaster.'
But over time, the winds screamed louder,
the skies split wider
Storms weren't visitors anymore.
They came often, hit harder,
turning childhood memories into warnings
the world refuses to hear.*

*The climate crisis isn't looming—
it's here, breathing down our necks,
churning oceans, tearing lives apart.
In Vanuatu, children bear its weight—
homes washed away, schools in rubble,
futures traded for footprints they didn't leave.
Every year, the land shrinks, the roots weaken,
and the culture we cling to is torn by the wind.
No resources, no time—just survival.
Constantly rebuilding
what an avaricious, anthropocentric society destroys.*

*Reiterating these repercussions is exhausting.
Our actions now matter.
Meet the Paris Agreement target,
and 5 million children will avoid the devastation of cyclones.
Climate justice is a child's right.
I stand and plead with the children of the South Pacific.
Protect our innocent futures.
Don't let that little girl, don't let us down.
please.*



Mark Njoroge/ Save the Children

A young girl with dark hair and a blue bow, wearing a pink and yellow floral dress, sits on a green bucket. She is in a cluttered outdoor area with various items like bags and wood in the background. A red speech bubble is overlaid on the left side of the image.

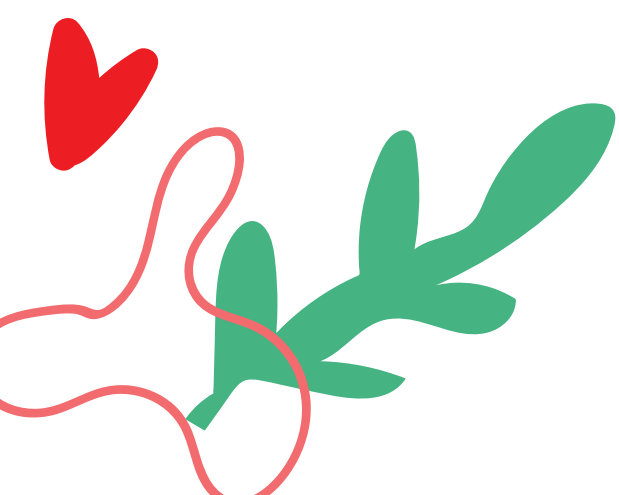
“People claim that the climate crisis is going to be a major problem in the future, but what they don’t realize is that it is happening right before their eyes.”

– Vesa, 14 years old, from Albania




Introduction

The climate crisis is having a huge impact on the world, resulting in severe consequences for current and future generations of children, and their rights. We know that human activity is responsible for the rapid warming of the planet. Wide scale destructive activities – like the use of fossil fuels and cutting down trees – are contributing to climate change. As a result, things like rising greenhouse gas levels, the rising temperature of oceans, and melting ice caps have already reached seriously high levels. This is leading to extreme weather events, like droughts, floods, and wildfires – all of which can be directly related to climate change. If the world does not act to reduce emissions, stop using fossil fuels and limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C above the levels they were at before fossil fuels began to be used for industry (pre-industrial levels), children in poorer countries will face the most dangerous impacts of the climate crisis.

A red heart and green leaves graphic is located on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the yellow speech bubble.

“In my country, climate change is impacting almost every aspect of children’s health and wellbeing, from their first days of life to adolescence. From rising temperatures affecting school performance, to droughts leading to undernutrition, floods resulting injuries and loss of life, and air pollution increasing adverse birth outcomes, the climate crisis is taking a toll on children’s health.”

Nehad, 13 years old, from Yemen



“Dry season is sometimes very long. When the rain does not come as it used to, people cannot plant. Because it is hard to plant, things will be hard, and people will die of hunger.”

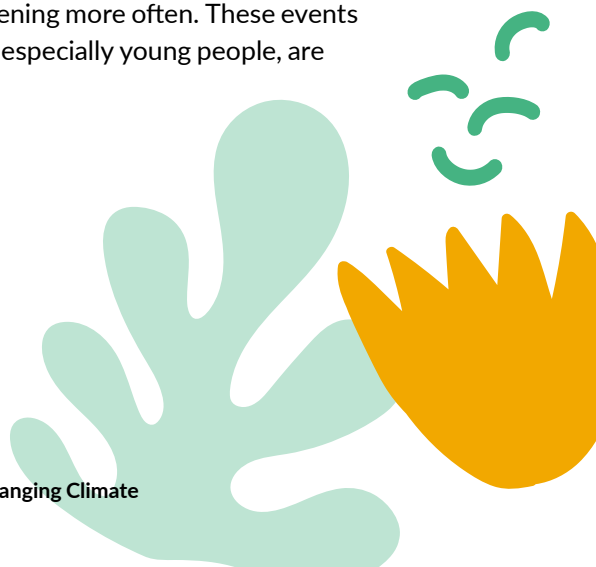
– 12-year-old-girl living in Nigeria



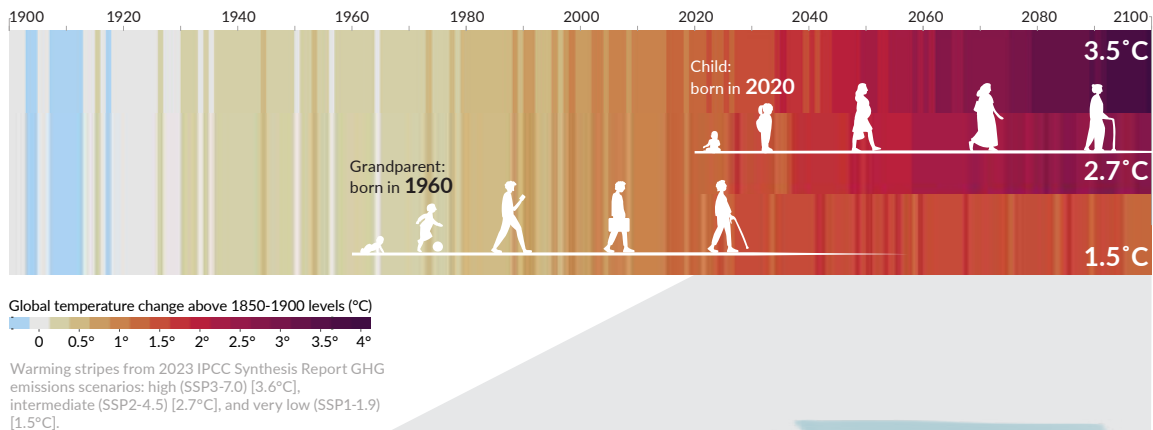
Impacts of the climate crisis on children

In 2015, countries from around the world gathered in Paris to agree to an international treaty on climate change – the Paris Agreement. Under the Paris Agreement, countries agreed to limit global warming levels to well below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. Each country promised to take certain actions to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and help manage the impacts of climate change. Mitigation measures are actions aimed at limiting global warming and its effects. For example, making efforts to reduce emissions, such as changing from oil, coal and gas to renewable energy sources like wind and solar. Adaptation measures are actions that aim to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change. For example, building flood defences to protect people and cities from rising sea levels.

Based on these promises, research developed by climate scientists from Vrije Universiteit in Brussels, has looked at how many children will face unprecedented heatwaves, crop failures, river floods, droughts and wildfires depending on how much the planet warms until the end of this century. 'Unprecedented' means something we have never seen before. Because of human-induced climate change, climate extremes like heatwaves or floods are happening more often. These events used to be very rare in the past. That is why more and more people, especially young people, are speaking up and taking action to address climate change.

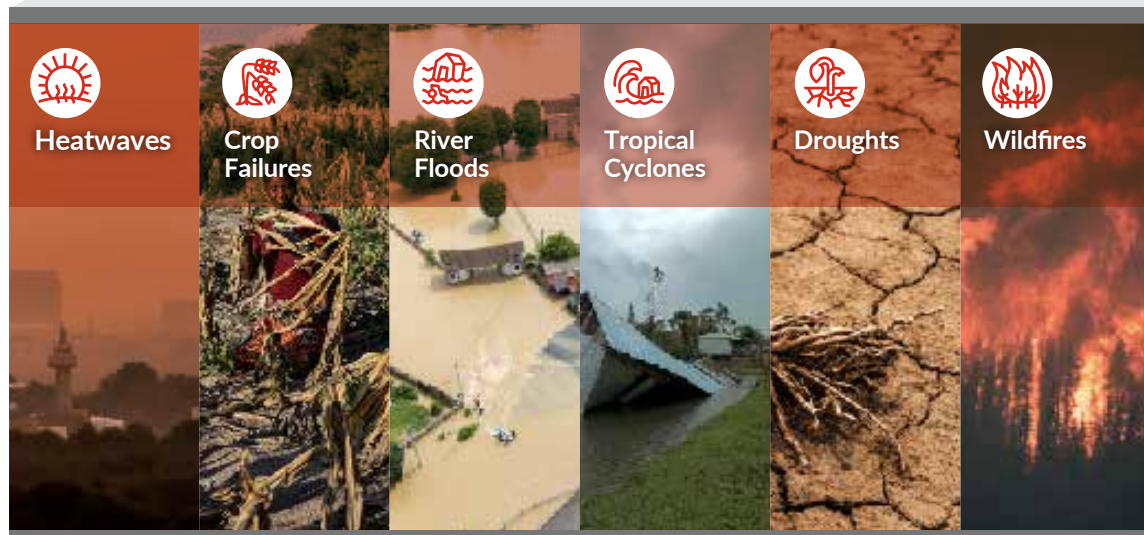


Global temperatures differ across the lifetime of two generations



In a world without climate change, there would only be a 1 in 10,000 chance of experiencing this level of unprecedented

Throughout their lifetimes, children born from today will experience new levels of climate extremes never seen before



This illustration shows how the Earth's temperature is increasing between 1900 and 2100. While grandparents born around 1960 also experience some climate extremes, children born in 2020 are likely to face many more due to rising global temperatures.

World leaders have made promises to take action on climate change. But even if they keep those promises, global temperatures could still rise by 2.7°C by the year 2100. This might seem far away, but we are already seeing significant climate impacts all around the globe. What we do now matters. The choices we make shape the kind of world children and young people will live in. Children born in 2020 will be 80 years old in 2100. Even small actions count. Every fraction of a degree we prevent makes a real difference. There is hope!



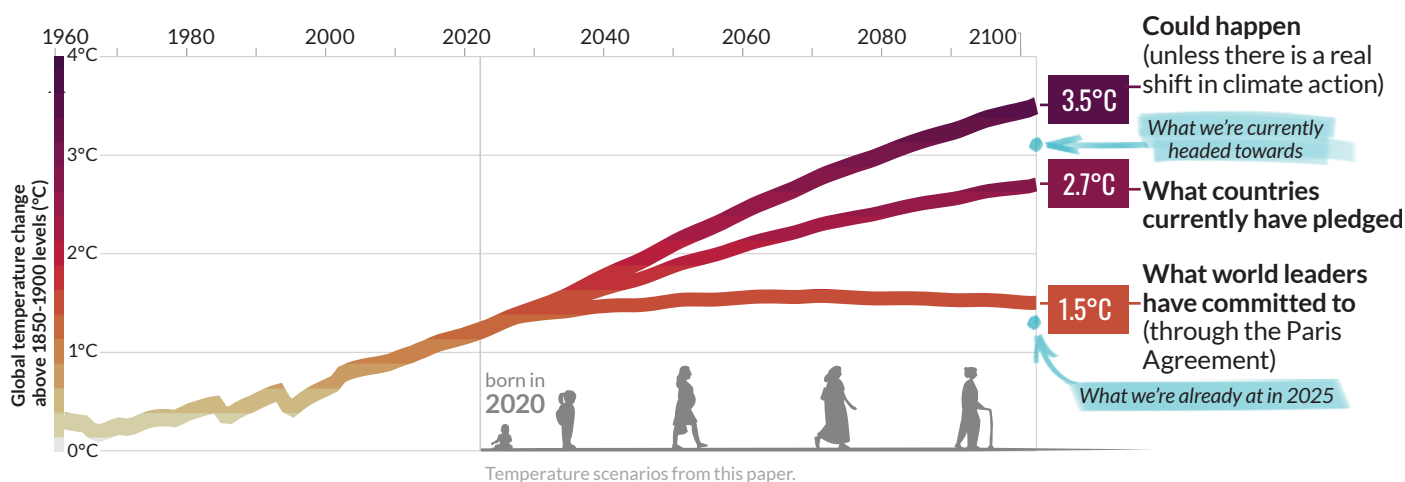
"My father lost his source of livelihood to flooding: his farmland became a river."

– 14-year-old-boy living in Nigeria

Lots of large-scale disasters hit our district which causes people to become impoverished, and children like us are engaged in child labour."

– 13-year-old-boy, Bangladesh

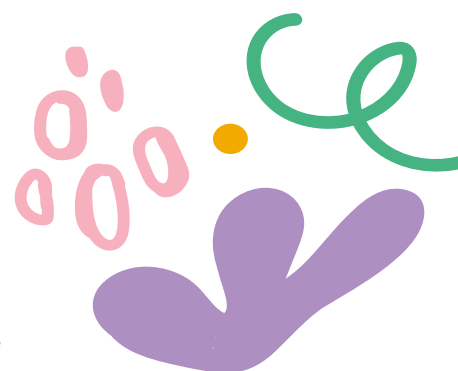
Three temperature scenarios show how the future will impact children



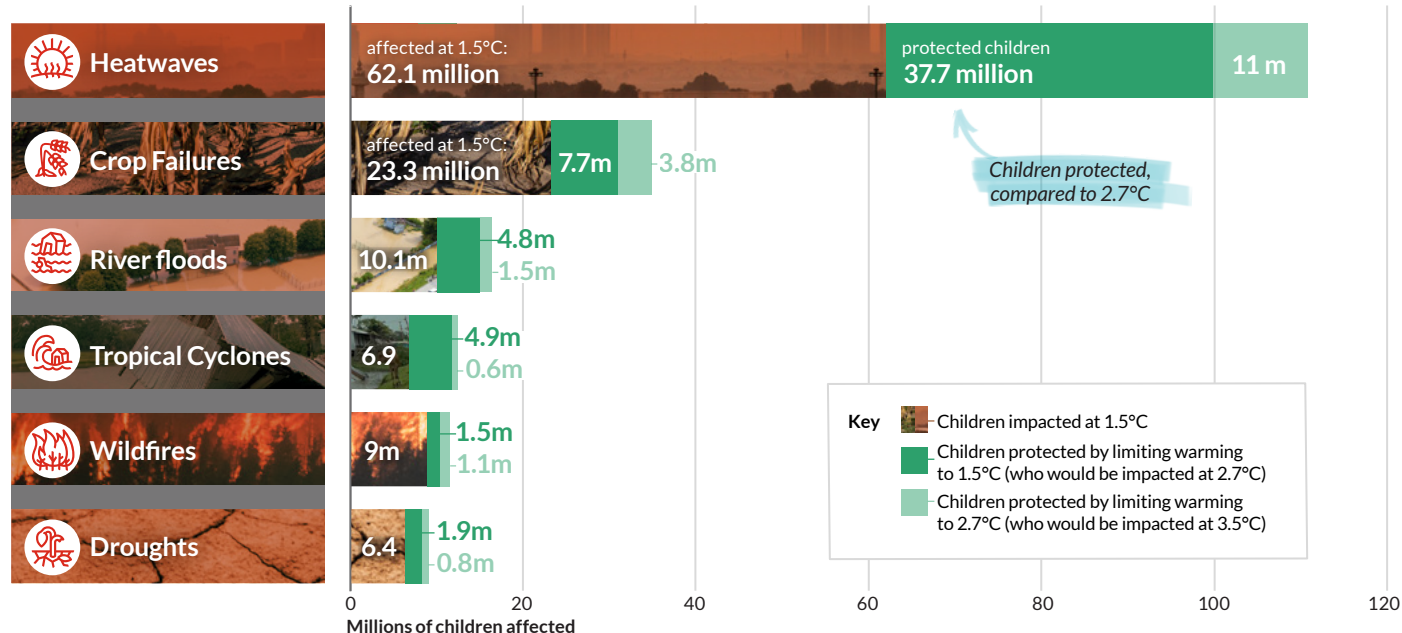
This illustration shows three different paths for how global warming can become in 2100. One line shows the goal world leaders agreed to through the Paris Agreement: stopping warming at 1.5°C. Another shows where we are heading if countries only do what they have promised so far. And the last one shows what could happen if no real action is taken. The two dots show how much warming we already have now, and where we are headed based on what countries are actually doing, not just what they promised.

Right now, the world isn't on track to limit global warming to 1.5°C, but that doesn't mean it is impossible. If we push for decision makers to step up and limit global warming to 1.5°C, as agreed in the Paris Agreement, 58 million children – almost half of the 120 million children born in 2020 – would be spared from experiencing dangerous climate extremes. We still have a chance to protect the planet and each other. Here is what the future could look like if we succeed and how many children born in 2020 can be protected:

- **Heatwaves:** 38 million children could avoid facing extreme heatwaves.
- **Crop Failures:** 8 million children could be spared from food shortages caused by crop failures.
- **River Floods:** 5 million children could avoid experiencing river floods.
- **Tropical Cyclones:** 5 million children could be spared from experiencing cyclones.
- **Droughts:** 2 million children would avoid experiencing severe droughts.
- **Wildfires:** 1.5 million children would be protected from dangerous wildfires.



By limiting warming to **1.5°C**, unprecedented lifetime exposure to climate extremes is avoided for over 77.2 million children born in 2020



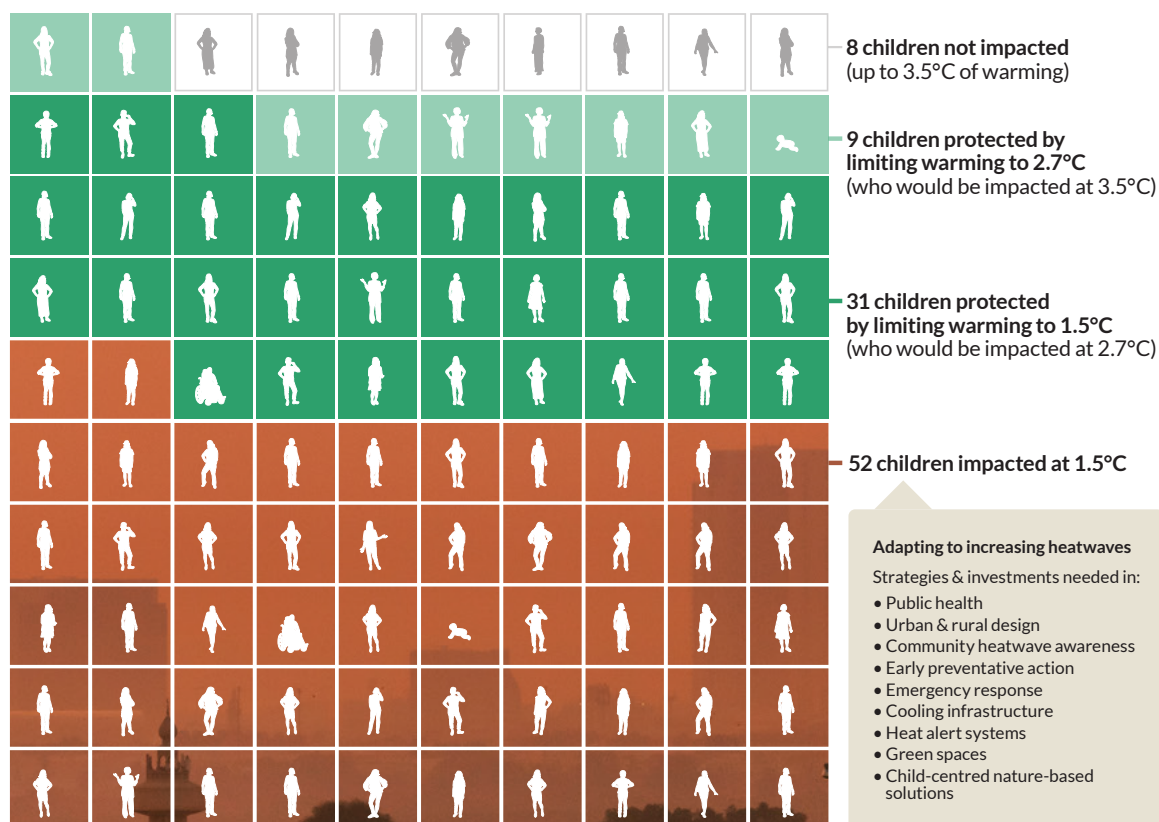
This illustration shows how many millions of children born in 2020 will face heatwaves, crop failures, river floods, tropical cyclones, wildfires and droughts if the world warms by 1.5°C, 2.7°C or 3.5°C. The light and dark green parts of the bars show how many children can be spared from experiencing climate extremes if warming is limited to 1.5°C. Compared to the number of children affected by climate extremes at 3.5°C of warming, that's 77.2 million children protected.

However, if we don't take action and temperatures rise to 3.5°C, 111 million children—almost all of those born in 2020—will face extreme heatwaves. This shows how important it is to act now.





Of 100 children, limiting warming to **1.5°C** protects 40 from unprecedented lifetime heatwave exposure



This illustration shows how many children out of 100 are affected by heatwaves if the world warms by 1.5°C, 2.7°C or 3.5°C. The light and dark green squares show how many children can be spared from experiencing unprecedented heatwaves if warming is limited to 1.5°C.

Children in almost every country will be affected if global warming goes above 1.5°C. But children in poorer countries will be hit the hardest, even though they have done the least to cause climate change.

This is not just because of geography, but due to economic inequality. Children born in 2020 are expected to experience many more heatwaves than their grandparents because of rising temperatures. But it is not just about when you are born, it is also about where and how you live. It's the children in communities with the least resources and access to healthcare who will face the most heatwaves. This means that they are less able to protect themselves from the heat, for example if they lack air conditioning or housing altogether. Children growing up in slums, for example, not only experience more heatwaves, they also have fewer resources to shield themselves from extreme heat which makes them more vulnerable. This is why we need to work together to protect our planet and ensure a safer future for all children.





“As children, we are never invited in their meetings about climate change, and we really do not know what they are discussing. At community level, we are also not engaged, we are considered as children and that is all.”

- Boy living in Malawi



Children’s participation in climate decisions

Around the world, children are taking bold action to stand up for their rights and the climate – organising strikes, petitions, and campaigns to demand action from governments. Under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to express their opinions and to have their opinions taken seriously – also known as the right to participate. This includes having access to information about issues that will impact them and are important to them, and having the chance to be involved in making decisions that affect them.

Even though children will be impacted the most by the climate crisis now and in the future, their right to be heard and participate is often not met, and children are left out of decision-making processes relating to climate change. This particularly impacts children that are most affected by inequality and discrimination, as they face additional barriers to participation. It is crucial that children are given the opportunity to participate safely, and have their voices heard in climate decisions at all levels.

“My message to the youth is: You’re not alone in this fight. Don’t stop making your voice heard! For as long as one of us keeps talking about such issues, the fight’s not over! and to the adults: Currently you’re the adults in this world, so get a grip and act like actual adults.”

- Vesa, 14 years old, from Albania





Recommendations

To fight climate injustice, protect children's rights and keep the promises made in the SDGs and Paris Agreement, world leaders need to act now. Without bold action, millions of children will face even more dangerous climate extremes. Decision makers, multilateral and bilateral donors, the private sector and non-governmental organisations must:

- **Cut down emissions and stop climate change from getting worse:** We need to act fast to keep global warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. To do this, countries must stop using and funding fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas because they are the biggest cause of climate change. Countries that have caused the most pollution in the past should lead the way in making this change.
- **Prioritize climate finance that works for children:** According to the new climate finance goal adopted at COP29, by 2035 rich countries should give at least \$300 billion each year to support climate action. This money should go to the countries that are most affected by the climate crisis, especially those that don't have enough resources to deal with it. The funding should support projects that help children, keep them safe, and promote gender equality. Richer countries should also provide extra money to help with the damage already caused by climate change.
- **Empower children's voices:** Children and young people have great ideas around solving climate and environmental issues. They should be part of the decisions that affect their future. Leaders should create more platforms and opportunities for children to speak up, share their ideas and help shape climate policies.



"We call on global leaders to invest in locally led adaptation and resilience projects that reflect the needs and voices of children and young people."

– Children from Somalia

"We are witnessing the loss of homes, schools, and essential community spaces. We call on the international community to commit to loss and damage financing, ensuring that countries like Somalia can rebuild and protect future generations from irreversible harm."

– Children from Somalia



“We ask that teachers, community leaders, and other adults receive training on climate change, biodiversity, and recycling, so they can provide us with better education.”

– A group of 13 child activists aged 13-18 from Colombia demands.

- **Protect children’s rights to a safe and healthy planet:** All children have the right to live in a clean, healthy and safe environment. Government must take real action to protect these rights at both national and international levels. They should listen to how climate change is affecting children and make sure their rights are protected in all climate decisions.
- **Strengthen support systems for children and their families during the climate crisis:** Climate change can make life harder for families by affecting their homes, jobs or access to food and water. Governments should provide support like financial assistance, healthcare, education and nutrition so children can stay healthy, safe and strong.
- **Prioritize child-centered climate adaptation:** As climate change impacts grow, children must be protected before, during and after events like floods, heatwaves and droughts. This means making sure they always have access to healthcare, education, safe water, food and protection. Governments should also invest in research to find better ways to help children stay safe and strong in the face of future climate impacts.

“We demand that resources be distributed fairly, to help the most vulnerable places and groups of people and the areas most affected by climate change, because we all deserve a better life and to have our rights respected.”

– Children from Colombia





Glossary



CLIMATE CHANGE

The long-term change in average weather patterns at the local, regional and global level as a result of human action. These changes have a number of effects, including droughts, floods, the melting of ice caps, and sea level rise.

CLIMATE CRISIS

A term used to describe the problems that are being caused or are likely to be caused by changes to the world's weather as a result of climate change.

EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Unexpected, unusual, severe or unseasonal weather events. They include things like droughts, heatwaves, floods, crop failures, and wildfires.

FOSSIL FUELS

A lot of the world's energy is produced by burning fossil fuels, such as oil, coal and gas. Burning fossil fuels creates carbon dioxide gas, which increases the overall temperature of the earth and is damaging to the environment.

PARIS AGREEMENT

An international treaty on climate change, which countries agreed to at COP21 in Paris, 2015. The goal of the Paris Agreement is to limit global warming levels to well below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels.

PRE-INDUSTRIAL LEVELS

Before fossil fuels began to be used for industry, there was less CO₂ in the air and the earth was cooler – these are levels that we use to compare with current information about the climate.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Natural sources of energy that can be used to create electricity and that will never run out, such as wind, sun, and water.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (UNCRC)

An international treaty that contains all of the rights that children have because they are children. Almost every government in the world has officially agreed with the UNCRC. This means they have promised to take steps to make sure that your rights are supported and protected.



Endnotes

ⁱ Save the Children (2023). Nothing About Us, Without Us. Available from <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/nothing-about-us-without-us/>

ⁱⁱ Save the Children. (2024). Children's Climate Demands for COP29. Available from <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Childrens-Climate-Demands-for-COP29-final.pdf/>





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