

BORN INTO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

WHY
WE MUST ACT **NOW**
TO SECURE
CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS

RECOMMENDATIONS



Save the Children



Pablo Barnes / Save the Children

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the international community now considers its development trajectories in a post-pandemic world, the climate crisis must remain central in order to build more resilient communities. We cannot ‘build back better’ by re-assembling the building blocks of economies that have failed the most vulnerable, safety nets that have allowed those in need to fall through the gaps, and industries that continue to harm our planet and people. COVID-19 recovery efforts provide an opportunity to move beyond a limited ambition to restore ‘business as usual’ to an ambition of building forward toward a better, greener and more equal future for children. We must question the foundations of the systems that have proven to be so fragile in the face of such disruption, and recognise that this crisis is an opportunity for hope and positive change.

It is also critical that children of current and future generations are not only at the heart of all decisions, but at the table. In developing our recommendations, the Child Reference Group who supported the development of this report identified their own recommendations. The views of these children and climate change technical specialists converge to highlight the urgent need for ambitious climate action and financing, shock-responsive social protection, and inclusive decision-making. Together, these recommendations provide a crucial blueprint for decision-makers responsible for realising children’s rights and protecting the best interests of children.

Urgent, comprehensive, and transformative climate action

Governments have been far too slow to recognise that the climate crisis represents a grave intergenerational injustice and acute threat to children’s rights, wellbeing, and opportunities, both now and in the future. Without urgent and concerted action on climate change taken in the rapidly closing window that scientists say we have to act, the future for children will be significantly bleaker. Save the Children is calling on governments – particularly those of high-income countries who have benefitted from exploitation of the environment – donors, the private sector, and multilateral agencies, to acknowledge that the climate crisis affects children first and worst, to declare a climate emergency, and to take urgent and tangible steps towards scaling up climate action and emissions reduction efforts. These efforts include:

- **Taking ambitious and urgent action now to limit warming to a maximum of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.** Without immediate, rapid, and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach. To avert catastrophic warming of the earth, governments must redouble efforts to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. This should involve increasing the ambition articulated in NDCs to include committing to the urgent and drastic reduction of emissions and necessary climate change mitigation commitments to limit warming to 1.5°C, in line with best available science.
- **Rapidly phasing out the use and subsidy of fossil fuels and other environmentally destructive practices, moving towards renewable and green energy as quickly as possible,** and providing incentives to ensure the families most affected by inequality and discrimination are supported to access new economic opportunities driven by the green economy. The burning of coal, oil, and natural gas are the main drivers of the climate crisis¹. High-income countries, which have a unique responsibility for the problem, must lead the way towards a just transition from investment in fossil fuels towards green jobs, and ensure that low- and middle-income countries are supported to transition to net-zero carbon economies and adapt to the now-unavoidable impacts of climate change.
- **Implementing commitments made in the UN Human Rights Council resolution on realising the rights of the child through a healthy environment.** This includes, but is not limited to, recognising a right to a healthy environment in national legislation in order to promote justiciability, strengthen accountability, and facilitate greater participation of children; strengthening regulatory agencies and ministries responsible for overseeing standards relevant to the rights of the child implicated by climate change; and strengthening efforts to monitor childhood exposure to the impacts of climate change by collecting information on the impact of environmental harm on children². This commitment to children’s rights should be strengthened by establishing a UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change.

- **Signing and implementing the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action³ to accelerate inclusive, child and youth-centered climate policies and action at national and global levels.** Developed by representatives of the Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative, UNICEF, and the Children and Youth constituency to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Declaration is based in priorities and inputs identified by children around the world through online and in-person consultation.
- **Systematically assessing the impact of climate related laws, policies, financing, and programmes on different groups of children, and make these assessments publicly available.** Child rights impact assessments help make the impact on children visible, inform more effective and child-sensitive policy-making, and ensure that policies and other actions do not harm children.
- **Taking an equitable approach to policy planning and implementation, including by analysing existing inequalities and disaggregating data, at a minimum by age, gender, and disability status,** in order to capture the specific impact of the climate crisis on different groups of children. Weaknesses in data collection and over-reliance on averages fail to capture the impact on children, particularly girls and other groups affected by inequality and discrimination.
- **Ensuring integrated preparedness plans are in place to respond to future crises that impact children’s learning and wellbeing via sustained investments in key sectors such as education, health, social protection, and child protection. This includes flexible, accessible, inclusive, and gender-responsive distance learning programmes** that can be scaled up rapidly in the event of future school closures and prevent disruptions to learning in the event of crises. These must be developed and implemented in consultation with children, parents, education authorities, school leaders, teachers, and school staff. Over the longer-term, construction or improvement of physical education facilities should draw on the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies Guidance on Safer School Construction to make schools more resilient to disasters and shocks.
- **Affirming that the private sector has a crucial role to play in combating the climate crisis.** Actors in the private sector should be a key part of leading the just transition to sustainable carbon-neutral economies that will safeguard our planet and the future of children, including by divesting from fossil fuels and creating greener jobs. Through their activities, products, or business relationships, the private sector should identify, prevent, and mitigate exposure of children to toxicants and environmental degradation. They should also carry out environmental and human rights impact assessments that examine the effects of proposed action on children in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Children’s Rights and Business Principles. The private sector is also in a position to contribute to closing the climate finance gap and raise greater awareness about the climate crisis.



Children’s recommendations

- Decision-makers should take all information that they receive about climate change into account.
- Reduce fossil fuels and move towards renewable and green energy.
- Governments should give more support to communities to cut pollution and fossil fuel use, and make sure that green and renewable energy alternatives are accessible for all people to use.
- Promote public transportation as a way to cut emissions. This could also make it easier for people to continue to access work and school even during extreme weather events.

Rapid scale up of climate finance for mitigation, adaptation and anticipatory action

Without substantial increases in financing, climate commitments and policies will remain empty promises to the millions of children that are affected by the climate crisis on a daily basis. High-income countries, who have historically contributed the most to climate change, must fulfil their financial pledges to low- and middle-income countries who have contributed far less, but who are now suffering the consequences. Save the Children is calling on governments and donors to adopt an intergenerationally just approach to climate finance and adaptation. This includes:

- **Increasing climate financing to fulfil the unmet pledge to mobilise at least \$100 billion annually by 2020, and help poorer countries transition to clean development and manage unavoidable impacts, using specified metrics to ensure child-sensitive investment.** This includes new and additional financial support, given as grants and based on principles of predictability, transparency, and being locally-led, as articulated in the Global Commission on Adaptation's Principles for Locally Led Adaptation⁴. Countries with the highest levels of historic responsibility must address their carbon debt for causing climate change and climate damage by contributing their fair share of climate finance flows.
- **Allocating at least 50% of investment to adaptation, resilience, and disaster risk reduction measures, particularly those that specifically benefit the children most affected by inequalities and discrimination.** Without a significant scaling-up of investment in adaptation – only constituting 11% of global public climate finance in 2017–18 – millions of children will suffer from the irreversible impacts that have already been set in motion⁵. National approaches to climate and disaster risk reduction should also ensure coherence between the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promises to leave no one behind.
- **Creating a new climate finance mechanism to address loss and damage by 2023.** In climate vulnerable communities across the world, the irreversible impacts of the climate crisis are costing children their rights, particularly those who are suffering because of inequality and discrimination. Governments need to support the development of new and additional climate finance to urgently address rapidly escalating loss and damage, as well as the creation of a new climate finance mechanism for loss and damage by 2023. Governments should agree the operational entity to mobilise this technical assistance in the form of the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage, which must be inclusive, gender-sensitive, fit-for-purpose, and enabled to deliver real technical assistance to the countries, communities, and children on the frontlines of the climate crisis.
- **Prioritising anticipatory actions to save lives and livelihoods,** with investment in analytics, pre-agreed financing, and action plans to rapidly support communities before disasters occur, helping avert full scale humanitarian crises. Evidence is growing that robust forecast-based finance (FbF) is a highly cost-effective way to protect communities from predictable climate change risks. More investment is needed to ensure the right analytics are in place, that conflict and child-sensitive action plans are agreed, and that financing is available. This will ensure payouts are timely and actions appropriate to protect communities and children.
- **Ensuring a comprehensive focus on children, especially those most impacted by inequalities and discrimination, in international and national climate related commitments, policies, and frameworks.** To address this, governments must ensure that children and their rights are explicitly included in revised national climate plans, including the Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans. The specific needs and situation of vulnerability experienced by girls, indigenous children, children with disabilities, refugee, migrant and displaced children, and other groups impacted by inequality and discrimination, must be given due attention. UNFCCC decision-making processes must integrate a stronger focus on children's rights and those furthest behind as a cross-cutting priority, and to ensure safe and meaningful opportunities for children to influence these processes.

Children's recommendation

- Governments should give more support to communities to cut pollution and fossil fuel use, and make sure that green and renewable energy alternatives are accessible for all people to use.

Supporting children's meaningful engagement and agency in climate policy

Policymakers and the wider public must recognise children as equal stakeholders and key agents of change in addressing the climate and environmental crisis. They must respect and protect children's rights to expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and their right to act as environmental human rights defenders in law and practice. Save the Children is calling on governments, intergovernmental organisations, the private sector, and civil society actors to take tangible steps towards supporting and respecting children's engagement and agency in climate policy by:

- **Empowering and supporting children to take action on climate issues that are important to them.** In particular, the children most affected by inequality and discrimination must have real opportunities to exercise their right to speak out, mobilise, campaign, demand accountability, and participate fully in climate and environmental discussions and policy development at all levels.
- **Enacting laws that guarantee the rights of children to participate in all matters affecting them, including public decision-making processes with implications for the climate and environment.** Law and policy should be specific and provide guidance on the format, structure, operation, and evaluation of all child participatory mechanisms. Sufficient financial and other resources must be made available to ensure sustainable and effective mechanisms are introduced and maintained.
- **Establishing child-friendly mechanisms and platforms on- and off-line to facilitate children's safe and effective formal engagement in climate policy making.** Violations of children's rights must be addressed, including gender-based violence and threats experienced by girls.
- **Ensuring that laws restricting civil society activities of child and adult climate activists must be necessary, reasonable, and proportionate to a legitimate purpose,** and never limit those rights which are absolute or non-derogable.
- **Ensuring that children have access to justice, including effective remedies and reparation of violations due to environmental harm and climate related child rights violations, through child-friendly and gender-responsive complaints mechanisms at all levels,** including by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.



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- **Ensuring that children have access to age-, gender- and ability-appropriate information and education on the climate and environmental crisis through formal and informal education** to ensure that children have the necessary skills and knowledge to build resilience and adaptive capacity, and to empower children to influence, promote, and create a more sustainable future. Governments must ensure that all children access safe learning environments where school safety, risk reduction, and resilience are mainstreamed.

Children's recommendations

- We need to make sure that every child can reach their rights at all times.
- Children are the future leaders of tomorrow, and so children's voices always need to be respected, taken seriously, and included in decisions on climate.
- Everyone, including parents, teachers, and leaders, needs to understand how climate is impacting children's rights, and children's right to participate in decisions on climate.
- Child participation needs to be inclusive for all children, including children who may need additional support to participate.
- All children should be given good information to participate in decision-making processes on climate that makes sense to them.

Fulfilling children's right to social protection

In addition to increasing climate finance, particularly for locally led adaptation, governments must explore other means of shoring up community resilience to shocks. Save the Children is calling on governments and donors to:

- **Scale up social protection systems to mitigate the increasing impacts of climate shocks on children and their families**, with the ambition to move to universal child benefits over time to improve child well-being and build resilience. Social protection systems must be child-sensitive, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, linked to child protection systems, and include children experiencing inequalities and discrimination. These systems must also be shock-responsive – allowing for efficient and effective additional payments to help families cope before, during, or after climate related and other shocks – and complemented by children's access to quality education, child protection services, and primary health care services that are free at the point of use, as part of Universal Health Coverage.

Children's recommendation

- People who work in fossil fuels industries need to have access to social protection as they could lose their job when we move to green and renewable energy sources.



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Endnotes

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2: UN Human Rights Council, 2020.

3: Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, *Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action*. Available from <https://www.childrenvironment.org/declaration-children-youth-climate-action>.

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5: Buchner, B., Clark, A., Falconer, A., Macquarie, R., Meattle, C., Tolentino, R. and Wetherbee, C. 2019. *Global Landscape of Climate Finance 2019*. Climate Policy Initiative, London. p. 2.



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