

Protect, Prepare, Prioritize:

A call to action on climate and children



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A THREAT TO EVERY CHILD

The climate crisis is here. The [world has already warmed by approx. 1.1C since the 19th century](#) and the last 7 years (2015 –2021) were the [warmest on record](#). It has exposed every child on every continent to more frequent, intense and destructive climate hazards including air pollution, water scarcity, heatwaves, vector-borne disease, cyclones, and river and coastal flooding.

Because of the gulf between the global action needed to reduce emissions and any tangible game-changing response, the climate crisis will rapidly intensify and its impact on children will become deadlier. Children are already uniquely vulnerable to death and damage from climate change - they are less able to survive extreme weather, are more susceptible to toxic chemicals, temperature changes and diseases. If they survive, this harm lasts a lifetime and perpetuates and deepens inequality and poverty for generations. Those in the poorest communities, with fewest resources, and the least responsibility for emissions are facing the most immediate dangers. These areas are also likely to experience the greatest growth in child populations. We are already seeing the deadly impacts of climate change play out in places like the Horn of Africa, where three failed consecutive rainy seasons have caused one of the worst droughts in decades. 10 million children in these countries need urgent life-saving support.

Global emissions reduction is the only long-term solution to the climate crisis as human activity, predominantly from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) is the root cause of climate change. With a 1.1-degree Celsius rise in global average temperatures confirmed - and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warning that some impacts are likely irreversible even if emissions are immediately drastically reduced - the frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events will worsen in the coming decades.

With over 1 billion children at extremely high risk now, and 4.2 billion children to be born over the next 30 years, there is an urgent need for countries to adapt, prepare and build resilience in preparation for more frequent and severe climate hazards.

AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE; PROTECT, PREPARE, PRIORITIZE

The climate crisis is here and accelerating. Global emissions reduction remains is the only long-term solution to the climate crisis. It must be achieved urgently. However, the world is off-track to reduce emissions, and any changes will come too late, especially for the most vulnerable children.

Urgent action to build the resilience of children and young people to climate change is needed. Adaptation and resilience building offers the most effective way to protect child lives and family livelihoods from the immediate and expected impacts. Adaptation saves lives. Delay means death. UNICEF is calling on each country to;

1. PROTECT every child:

To protect the health, safety, learning and opportunities of every child, the critical social services they rely on - water and sanitation (WASH), health, education, nutrition, social protection and child protection - must be adapted and made resilient to the growing impacts of climate change. Countries must;

Urgent action to build the resilience of children and young people to climate change is needed. Adaptation and resilience building offers the most effective way to protect child lives and family livelihoods from the immediate and expected impacts. Adaptation saves lives. Delay means death. UNICEF is calling on each country to;

- Ensure WASH, Health, Education, Nutrition, Social Policy and Child Protection services are climate-sensitive. They must include climate adaptation and resilience within their own plans to ensure they are resilient.
 - Safe water and sanitation are essential for children's health and development, and they also decrease children's exposure to life-threatening risks such as diarrhoeal disease and malnutrition. Water and sanitation services should be climate resilient to ensure the sustainable access to safe drinking water for all children over time. This includes transitioning to solar-powered water systems and improving practices around water extraction, use, management and conservation.
 - Unhealthy environments contribute to one in four deaths in children under five years old. Every child has a right to a healthy environment. Health systems should be adapted so that they are climate-smart and resilient to environmental shocks and hazards; provide services to all children, especially the most vulnerable and at-risk due to climate change; and be geared to prevent, detect and treat disease in children considering the environmental burden to which they are exposed.
- Ensure climate policies and plans are child-sensitive. These must include and address the specific and overlapping climate-risks and vulnerabilities of children, including to disasters. Many countries lack sufficient climate adaptation plans or existing plans do not protect or address the needs of children. Adopting and implementing a comprehensive climate adaptation plan is among the most effective way of protecting children and livelihoods from the impacts of the climate crisis now and is critical for the resilience of every country.

Better data and evidence on climate- vulnerable child populations, monitoring the performance of each child-critical sectors, and regular updating and promoting plans as climate hazards evolve will further protect children from the worst climate hazards.



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2. PREPARE every child:

To prepare every child to live in a climate-changed world, their 'adaptive capacity' must be improved, their voices heard and acted on, and their education and skills enhanced so they can participate in creating a sustainable future. Countries must provide;

- Climate Change Education (CCE): Formal and informal education should provide children with knowledge of climate change, green skills and resilience techniques and ensure children participate in climate action, adaptation and resilience activities. CCE enables youth to be part of the solution, to influence household behaviour, and ultimately drives greater national action and commitment to address and respond to the crisis.
- Green Skills: By building practical green skills such as the ability to gather and interpret climate data and identify and implement climate-friendly technologies, young people are empowered to participate in the growing green economy and they can lay the path from livelihoods that will be less viable due to climate change.
- Disaster risk reduction education: Ensuring children know how to survive and respond to the increasing climate risks and hazards is essential, and is their right. Children must have the ability to participate in all aspects of comprehensive school safety, school and community disaster management and learn safety rules for specific hazards. Teachers must be trained on inclusive risk reduction methods, materials and curriculums. Formal and informal education settings must adopt operating procedures for hazards, conduct regular simulation drills and have risk reduction included in curriculums.
- Participate and consultation on climate adaptation and mitigation policymaking. To ensure young people are reflected in all decisions they should be represented within all key institutions and ministries with responsibility for implementing climate adaptation and resilience plans. Youth groups and bodies must be encouraged, consulted and listened to when developing and implementing adaptation plans and preventive long term mitigation measures affecting their future.



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3. PRIORITIZE children in climate funding and resources:

Protecting and preparing children and young people requires urgent funding and resources. Adaptation and resilience building remains critically underfunded and resourced. Countries must;

- Leverage and increase access to all available traditional, innovative and alternative climate and risk-reduction finance mechanisms including domestic budgets, bilateral, multilateral, private sector, international finance institutions and officially supported export credits to fill funding gaps and finance urgent and essential action.
- Reference domestic and international sources of finance within individual child-critical sector adaptation plans – WASH, health, nutrition, education, social policy and child protection – and cross-sectorial adaptation plans.
- Conduct analysis to identify urgent funding gaps and the costs of not investing assessments to determine where the initial cost of investment is outweighed by longer-term benefits to children.
- Invest in climate monitoring and forecasting systems, including Early Warning Systems, to enable communities to prepare, adapt and protect their children from climate shocks such as cyclones, floods and storm surges.

A TRANSFORMATIVE INVESTMENT

Protecting every child by adapting child critical services, **Preparing** every child by building their adaptive capacity and **Prioritizing** children in climate funding and resources will;

Reduce children's overall climate risk and build their resilience to future shocks

- Improved access to resilient WASH services can considerably reduce overall climate risk for 415 million children.
- Improved health and nutrition services can considerably reduce overall climate risk for 460 million children.
- Improved educational outcomes can considerably reduce overall climate risk for 275 million children.
- Improved shock-responsive social protection can reduce overall climate risk for 310 million children.
- With ambitious adaptation action, the number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance as a result of climate-related disasters annually could be as low as 68 million by 2030, and 10 million by 2050 – a decrease of 90 per cent compared to present day.

Deliver economic benefits by reducing risks that lower costs, increasing productivity driving innovation.

- Children are one of the largest groups at risk from climate change. Measures that specifically target this group can reduce the impacts of climate change across a large proportion of the population and may realize economies of scale. Child-led measures develop skills across a large segment of the population and over a longer time period.
- The return on investment from adaptation and resilience is very high. For example:
 - Every dollar invested in adaptation can result in up to US\$10 in net economic gains. Every US\$1 spent on disaster risk reduction can save between US\$4–US\$11 in losses from a variety of climate shocks. Investing in more resilient infrastructure could save \$4.2 trillion in climate change damages.
- Adaptation measures can offset damages associated with the degradation of WASH, health, nutrition, education, and protection services caused by climate change. For example, early warning systems save at least 10 times their cost in lives and assets. A 24-hour warning of an impending storm or heatwave can reduce damages by 30 per cent, and investing US\$800 million in such systems in underdeveloped countries could save up to US\$16 billion per year in damages.
- Investing \$US1.8 trillion globally in key adaptation areas, including: early warning systems, resilient water resources, climate resilient infrastructure, improved dryland crop production and mangrove protection from 2020 to 2030 could generate US\$7.1 trillion in total net benefits.



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THE COST OF INACTION

Without the implementation of national adaptation and resilience efforts:

- Failure to provide funding requirements, by 2030, for basic support to people in need after climate-related disasters could increase from between US\$3.5- \$12 billion at present to US\$20 billion per year.
- Failure to capitalize on the economic benefits of climate adaptation through high-return investments will result in the loss of trillions of dollars in potential development, economic growth and public expenditure. Source GCA (Global Center on Adaptation)
- Failure to protect children through adapting critical services will result in suffering and countless lives lost.
- Failure to prevent further climate impacts through adequate mitigation measures will increase the need for climate adaptation exponentially.

For every child

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

Thee furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.



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