

Climate and Environmental Rights for Future Generations

Katharina Skorpik

UNICEF Austria

April 16th 2024

unicef 
for every child



Main points:

- Why are children particularly affected by the climate crisis?
- Which children's rights are violated by the climate crisis?
- Which (climate) policy shifts do we need to strengthen child rights?
- What role do child rights play to reach the SDGs and elevate generational equity?



Children are particularly effected by the climate crisis

- The climate crisis is a child rights crisis.
- Children are the least responsible for climate change, yet they bear the greatest burden of its impacts.
- Globally, over 1 billion children – nearly half of the world’s children – live in countries at extremely high risk from the impacts of climate change.

Children are particularly affected by the climate crisis

- **Children are not little adults.** Their bodies and minds are still developing, rendering them disproportionately vulnerable.
- e.g. pollution, deadly diseases and extreme weather.



Which child rights are affected by the climate crisis?

- **General Comment 26 (GC 26)** of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2023)
 - Violation of children's right to a **healthy environment, education, health services, clean drinking water and hygiene**



Necessary (climate) policy shifts



- **General Comment 26:**
 - invaluable guidance how to accelerate inclusive, child and youth-centered climate policies and action at all levels
 - Children's rights mainstreaming into climate-change decision-making at all levels
 - fundamental and urgent need for all countries and other key stakeholders to take action to protect the environment and children's rights
- **Child-responsive or child rights-based approach**
 - children are entitled to protection of their rights from climate harm,
 - fully respected as rights-holders and environmental actors

Necessary policy shifts – Child Participation

- Children play a transformative role in climate action.
- Children are often overlooked and among the least empowered in decision making.
- **Children must be heard, they have a right to participation.** Meaningful participation in design and implementation of climate action is crucial.
- **Children’s education** is essential to increase their awareness and preparedness for climate harm, and to equip them with knowledge and skills necessary to face climate change (Green Skills).



Necessary (climate) policy shifts – Child Rights in Climate instruments

- Paris Agreement
 - Parties have agreed that States should when taking climate action, respect, promote, and consider the rights of children, as well as intergenerational equity
 - Important steps at COP 28, Expert Dialogue in June 24
- National and regional level
 - explicitly incorporate a focus on children’s rights in national/regional climate plans and instruments (children as rights-holders, addressing risks/capturing co-benefits across interventions e.g. in mitigation measures, efforts to reduce air pollution/enhance public transportation)

Necessary (climate) policy shifts – Adaptation

- Necessity of a sharp and urgent increase in the design and implementation of child-responsive adaptation measures
- Assessing risks to children
- Prioritizing access to essential services that children rely on: climate-resilience of water and sanitation, healthcare, nutrition and education, child protection infrastructure and services

Necessary (climate) policy shifts – Climate Finance, Loss & Damage

- **Finance:** Importance to finance projects that increase the resilience of young people to cope with climate change.
- **Loss & Damage:** children are disproportionately and uniquely affected; target children's distinct and heightened needs; appropriate safeguards to ensure that interventions don't inadvertently undermine their rights further.

Necessary (climate) policy shifts – Mitigation

- Governments should take urgent action to
 - phase out the use of fossil fuels,
 - ensure a just transition,
 - and invest in renewable energy, energy storage and energy efficiency
- Delaying this phase out will result in higher cumulative emissions, and greater harm to children's rights.

What role do child rights play to reach the SDGs and elevate generational equity?



- The SDGs contain many goals that target children
- The implementation of children's rights must be a central component of plans to achieve the SDGs
- Only if we focus more on child rights we will create more intergenerational equity



Thank you

unicef 
for every child

Further resources

- [GC 26: https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crccgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crccgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights)
- [UNICEF “Mapping the Global Goals for Sustainable Development and the Convention on the Rights of the Child” https://www.unicef.org/media/60231/file](https://www.unicef.org/media/60231/file)
- [UNICEF “The Climate Changed Child” https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-changed-child](https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-changed-child)
- [UNICEF “Children displaced in a changing climate” https://www.unicef.org/reports/children-displaced-changing-climate](https://www.unicef.org/reports/children-displaced-changing-climate)
- [UNICEF "Children's Climate Risk Index" \(CCRI\) https://data.unicef.org/resources/childrens-climate-risk-index-report/](https://data.unicef.org/resources/childrens-climate-risk-index-report/)
- [UNICEF “Falling short: Addressing the climate finance gap for children” https://www.unicef.org/reports/addressing-climate-finance-gap-children](https://www.unicef.org/reports/addressing-climate-finance-gap-children)
- [UNICEF “Beat the heat: protecting children from heatwaves in Europe and Central Asia” https://unicef.at/fileadmin/media/News/Pressemeldungen/2023/UNICEF-ECARO-heatwaves-policy-brief-FINAL.pdf](https://unicef.at/fileadmin/media/News/Pressemeldungen/2023/UNICEF-ECARO-heatwaves-policy-brief-FINAL.pdf)

Further resources

- www.unicef.org
- <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>
- <https://www.unicef.org/where-we-work>
- www.unicef.at (Natcom UNICEF Austria)
- <https://unicef.at/kinderrechte-oesterreich/kinderrechte-in-oesterreich/>
- Newsletter, Social Media