

## Advancing child-sensitive climate action: COP28 Policy Briefing

*In advance of COP28, and at the request of certain Parties, UNICEF has developed the following guidance on how children's rights, wellbeing and voices, as well as the resilience of child-critical essential services, can be elevated in UNFCCC decision-making, including key COP28 outcomes. This guidance draws on UNICEF's mandate to advocate for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's new General Comment No. 26 on child rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change,<sup>i</sup> and UNICEF's Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan.*

### Introduction

Climate change disproportionately affects the world's most vulnerable communities, including children who are uniquely susceptible due to physiological and developmental factors.<sup>ii</sup> A staggering 88% of the global disease burden associated with climate change is borne by children under the age of 5.<sup>iii</sup>

Parties have agreed that States should, when taking climate action, respect, promote and consider the rights of children, as well as intergenerational equity.<sup>iv</sup> However, this commitment has yet to translate into significant climate policy initiatives or investment. This is evidenced by the fact that less than half of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are child-sensitive,<sup>v</sup> and just 2.4 per cent of key global climate funds can be classified as supporting child-responsive programmes.<sup>vi</sup>

To safeguard children from escalating climate threats, immediate and decisive action is needed. Beyond the crucial transition to renewable energy, there is an urgent need to adapt essential services that children depend upon for their survival and health, such as healthcare, education, water systems, and food security. Effectively integrating the distinct needs and rights of children into climate policy and action – including their right to be heard – can underpin more effective and equitable climate solutions, generate significant social co-benefits for children's health and wellbeing, and foster the resilience of communities more broadly.

**As COP28 approaches, this briefing aims to assist Parties in exploring avenues for elevating children's needs and rights within the UNFCCC framework. It offers insights on integrating this focus as both a cross-cutting priority and through targeted recommendations on the Global Stocktake, Adaptation and Loss and Damage.**

### 1. COP28 Cover Decision: Elevate transversal consideration of children in the UNFCCC process by requesting an expert dialogue on children and climate change

The Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan took a critical step in recognizing the importance of children's participation in the planning and implementation of climate policy and action. Building on this progress, Parties at COP28 may consider inviting the Subsidiary Body for Implementation to convene an **expert dialogue on children and climate change**. The dialogue could aim to discuss a holistic approach to child-sensitive climate action, including addressing their distinct and heightened needs, as well as their participation.

#### Possible formulation for COP28 Cover Decision:

- XX. *Recognizes* the particular vulnerability of children, due to their unique metabolism, physiology and developmental needs, to the effects of climate change, and that exposure to those effects can have a lifelong impact on children, as their health outcomes, well-being and development are compromised from an early age.<sup>vii</sup>
- XX. *Requests* the Chair of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation to convene an expert dialogue at its sixtieth session (June 2024), to explore and assess relevant evidence and guidance for the design, planning, and implementation of climate action that respects, promotes and considers the rights of children; and reinforces the commitment to safeguarding children's rights in the broader context of the UNFCCC process.

**Rationale:** Feedback from Parties suggests that there is appetite to more systematically integrate child rights considerations in thematic areas under the Convention and Paris Agreement, to better understand recent data and evidence concerning the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children, and to build the capacity of Parties to design and implement child-responsive climate action for this uniquely vulnerable group. A dialogue would provide an opportunity to enhance understanding, share relevant knowledge and guidance, and explore options for further action.

## 2. The Global Stocktake (GST): Embed inclusion of children and intergenerational equity

The GST output presents an opportunity for Parties to send a clear signal that the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions should be both child- and gender-responsive. This can be done by:

- Elevating recognition of children’s position as a vulnerable group in need of special protection and investment, particularly with respect to adaptation and loss and damage.<sup>viii</sup>
- Recognizing the need for meaningful and cross-cutting engagement of children and youth in decision-making processes at all levels.<sup>ix</sup>
- Affirming that approaches to climate action should be aligned with countries’ human rights obligations, including the rights of children and the principle of intergenerational equity.<sup>x</sup>

**Rationale:** There can be no equity without the inclusion of children. The synthesis report on the GST technical dialogue emphasizes that a focus on inclusion and equity can increase ambition in climate action and support. Yet the report does not capture learnings from the Technical Dialogues (TD) on children or intergenerational equity. Parties can seek to “course-correct” this omission through the final GST output, integrating elements outlined above.

## 3. Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA): Advance inclusion of children and climate-resilient essential services within the GGA framework

In order to ensure that the GGA framework is child-responsive, the following proposals are suggested:

- Integrate the rights of children and intergenerational equity under *general and cross-cutting considerations* in the GGA framework.
- Recognize children and youth as key stakeholders in climate action, to bolster *inclusive and participatory approaches*.
- Identify *targets for themes/sectors* listed in Decision 3/CMA.4, prioritizing focus on essential social services that reach children and communities most at risk, including drinking water and sanitation, health, nutrition (food and agriculture), and social protection (livelihoods)
- *Add the education sector* as a theme.
- Mandate the development of *age- and sex-disaggregated indicators* under the GGA, in order to capture needs and progress for children and other vulnerable groups.

**Rationale:** The GGA framework must advance understanding of key strategies and policies required to enhance adaptation action, including through an explicit focus on children as a uniquely vulnerable group and by incorporating thematic/sector-based targets. Such targets are essential for engaging relevant line Ministries and adaptation practitioners whose involvement will be critical at every stage of the adaptation policy cycle. In particular, the education sector should be embedded under the GGA framework in order to address climate disruption of education for tens of millions of children each year, and to leverage the role of education in strengthening children’s and community resilience.<sup>xi</sup>

## 4. Loss and Damage: Ensure the L&D Fund and funding arrangements are child-responsive

The new Loss and Damage Fund and funding arrangements should:

- Respect and protect child rights – including the best interests of the child and their right to be heard – in loss and damaging financing decisions, and in the L&D Fund’s governing instrument, accountability mechanisms and guidelines.

- Ensure that financing provides immediate relief following sudden-onset events, as well as building long-term resilience for children, including for those affected by slow-onset events.
- Invest in early-warning and anticipatory action, adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, disaster risk reduction and broader adaptation and mitigation strategies and financing, addressing both economic and non-economic impacts.
- Ringfence significant resources for child-critical social services, including health, education, food, nutrition, clean energy, water, sanitation and child and social protection.
- Establish a dedicated funding window for local communities, facilitating more inclusive, equitable and effective climate finance in addressing children's context-specific priorities.

**Rationale:** Loss and damage caused by the climate crisis is one of the greatest intergenerational injustices that children face today. The recommendations above would embed child rights in the Fund's governance and decision-making processes, contributing to more equitable and effective response to loss and damage.<sup>xii</sup>

## 5. Other Actions

Beyond UNFCCC workstreams, Parties can take meaningful steps to further child-sensitive climate action by:

- **Making provision for the inclusion of children and young people in COP28 delegations and negotiation teams.** Youth negotiators should be provided with the necessary support, capacity building and mentorship to meaningfully participate as an effective member of negotiation teams. Parties should also consider including and supporting children and young people in official delegations as observers.
- **Signing the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action.**<sup>xiii</sup> Signed by 40 countries to date, Declaration signatories have committed to accelerate inclusive, child- and youth-centred climate policies and action. The Declaration serves as a framework for national dialogue and action, as well as a convening mechanism for supportive Parties within the UNFCCC process.

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<sup>i</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 26 (2023),

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-26-childrens-rights-and>

<sup>ii</sup> A child is defined as anybody under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>iii</sup> UNICEF, The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: introducing the children's climate risk index, 2021

<sup>iv</sup> Decision 1/CP.1 (Paris Agreement)

<sup>v</sup> UNICEF, *Child-Sensitive Climate Policies for Every Child*, 2022

<sup>vi</sup> Children's Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) coalition, *Falling short: addressing the climate finance gap for children*, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/addressing-climate-finance-gap-children>.

<sup>vii</sup> A/HRC/RES/45/30, 7 October 2020

<sup>viii</sup> In line with TD1.2 summary report, paras 189, 284, 324

<sup>ix</sup> In line with TD1.3 summary report, paras 137, 181, 183

<sup>x</sup> Synthesis report on the GST technical dialogue, para 91, and TD1.3, para 152

<sup>xi</sup> Full UNICEF submission on the GGA [here](#).

<sup>xii</sup> Children's Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) coalition's submission to the Transitional Committee, *Climate Justice: Loss and Damage finance for Children*, 2023,

<https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Child%20Rights-LD%20briefing-11Aug2023.pdf>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/climate-declaration>