

13 CLIMATE ACTION



# KEY ASKS

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## SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

Climate change, environmental pollution, and biodiversity loss have created a planetary crisis. Climate-related events are growing in frequency and intensity. ***Every child is exposed or at risk of exposure to at least one major climate and environmental hazard, shock or stress*** with one billion living in high-risk countries. The numbers are staggering: 90% of children are exposed to air pollution with 1/3 of children globally exposed to lead pollution; 920 million children are exposed to water scarcity; 43 million are displaced due to extreme weather; 24 million children are projected to be undernourished by 2050 as result of the climate crisis; 38 million have had their education disrupted due to climate; and at least 175 million children are estimated to be directly affected by climate-related disasters. Taking action to **achieve child rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child** across the SDGs including economic opportunities, nutrition, health, education, equity, water, energy, and peace will be contingent on addressing and adapting to climate change. Children are explicitly recognized as stakeholders in the [Paris Accord](#) and thus climate change adaptation and mitigation plans need to be child inclusive.

UNICEF is committed to realizing the right of every child and adolescent to live in a clean, healthy, and sustainable climate and environment by galvanizing global commitment to ensure a sustainable world and protect the most vulnerable children from the worst impacts of a changing climate and degrading environment by:

- Improving the adaptation and resilience of sustainable essential social services across water, health and education that reaches the last mile to reduce vulnerability for children today and into the future;
- Sustainable low-carbon WASH services through leveraged large-scale climate finance for areas most vulnerable to climate change;
- Climate informed risk reduction, humanitarian action and resilient recovery from disasters; and
- Increasing young people's access to education, green skills and platforms for engaging with decision makers to be more effective champions for sustainability.



## KEY ASKS

UNICEF encourages governments conducting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to ensure their reports on SDG 13 are:

### 1. Preparing children:

- **Supporting continuous and environmentally focused education.** Education systems, infrastructure and curricula need to be adopted to teach children about climate change, the environment and responsible and sustainable consumption and production. This will equip children and young people with the skills needed to build the green economies and assume the green jobs of tomorrow.
- **Enhancing ambition of mitigation & adaptation approaches for children and youth.** Is the climate strategy/policy ambitious and urgent, does it have ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures that protect the rights and best interests of children and young people from harm caused by climate change, is it holistic and multi-sectoral, does it address the specific risks and vulnerabilities for young people through specific sector interventions?
- **Recognizing children as agents of change** and provide a platform to elevate their views, opinions, and concerns, identifying solutions, and promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles – setting an example for their communities. The participation of children is both a necessity and also part of their fundamental rights ([Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)). Support meaningful **participation of children and young people in climate change processes**, including through the Action for Climate Empowerment dialogues, including youth as part of your government's UNFCCC delegation, and signing the [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#).

### 2. Protecting children from the impacts of climate change will requires increased focus and financing on adaptation and increasing the resilience of the services that children depend upon most - such as water, health, education, and nutrition.

- **Making children and child voices/solutions the centre of climate change and environmental strategies and plans.** Child rights should be explicitly integrated into key national climate change and adaptation strategies, policies and

planning documents, including the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), as well as COVID-19 recovery plans and budgets. This is essential given that recent evidence shows, a mere [34% of climate policies were found to be child-sensitive](#). The views, and voices of children should also be sought for both the development and implementation of said policies and plans, through inclusive dialogue and consultation with children and young people.

### 3. Prioritizing funding:

- **Accelerating and scaling up investments to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity of children to climate impacts.** The SDGs and [Sendai framework](#) specifically reference the urgent need to strengthen resilience to natural and climate related disasters and shocks (drought, floods, epidemics, and storms). Climate adaptation and climate-related disaster risk reduction measures must be implemented for and with children: climate resilient school structures in vulnerable zones, youth dialogue to enhance social cohesion, and participatory climate risk mappings are examples of working for and with children to achieve climate resilient development in risk-prone settings. Ensure climate-resilient response includes investments in child protection, education, health, nutrition, and WASH.

### 4. Reducing greenhouse gases and promote sustainable energy investments

so that global temperature increases are limited ideally to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly increasing, and the world is not on track to meet its commitments to avoid global warming. Ambitious targets and actions to curb emissions will benefit hundreds of millions of children. Prioritising sustainable energy and low carbon solutions, such as decentralized solar energy, cleaner cooking fuels and energy conservation practices in public facilities, will not only assist in curbing greenhouse gas emissions but simultaneously ensure access to clean, reliable, and modern energy services.

### 5. Addressing environmental degradation and reduce the effect of harmful pollutants on children.

More than 1.7 million children under the age of five lose their lives every year as a result of avoidable environmental risks, representing 26% of child deaths –while millions more suffer disease and disabilities. Emerging and alarming evidence is beginning to show the direct impact of air pollution on children’s physical and cognitive development. Air pollution exceeds safe levels for nearly 2 billion children and is exceedingly high for over 1 billion children with a 15 per cent higher chance of death. Worldwide, over half a million children under five years died from air pollution related causes in 2016<sup>1</sup>. 1 billion children (almost half of children globally) are currently highly exposed to air pollution that exceeds 35µg/m<sup>3</sup>– which is seven times the WHO global air quality guidelines<sup>2</sup>. It is the most disadvantaged children and communities who are often at the greatest risk further perpetuating inter-generational cycles of poverty and inequity. Air pollution is exacerbated by the use of fossil fuels – a key driver of climate change. *See also SDG 12.*

### 6. Reducing inequity to promote resilience to climate change.

Programmes to develop policies, raise awareness, build institutional capacity, and support communities to adapt to climate change and strengthen their resilience must prioritize the poorest and most marginalized children, families and communities who are disproportionately affected. Reducing inequities now – providing access to safe water and adequate sanitation; good nutrition and food security; strong and accessible health systems; and well-functioning and [shock responsive](#) child and social protection systems - will give disadvantaged children a better adaptive capacity to cope with climate change impacts. *See also SDG 10.*



## MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

Collecting and disaggregating SDG 13 targets and indicators is vital in understanding how and where children are being left behind to accelerate strategies and actions on priority areas for children and climate action. Progress towards the SDGs has slipped backwards, and children are the hardest hit. Not only does this have grave consequences for children now, but it is also a threat to their future and our shared humanity.



## INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Recent estimates suggest that the cost of climate inaction is trillions of dollars more costly – and deadly – than the financial costs of cutting carbon pollution. Increasing the resources available to deal with climate change is both urgent and necessary to protect children and future generations from the worst impacts of climate change and ensure a safer future through adaptations including through low carbon development. Long-term climate finance must be distributed and targeted to capacitate the most vulnerable to cope with the growing impacts of climate change. UNICEF encourages governments to:

- **Allocate climate funding** (domestic/international) to promote and scale up investments/actions for children.
- **Work in partnership with the private sector** to develop and incentivize innovative approaches and technologies to benefit children most at risk from climate impacts and environmental degradation. For instance, working together on the Business Statement on Children and Climate, which calls for commitments from both governments and business to set ambitious emissions targets, support adaptation and resilience of services for children, source 100% renewable energy, and more.

<sup>1</sup> WHO, 2016 Burden of disease from the joint effects of household and ambient air pollution

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, Children’s Climate Risk Index, 2021



## ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

UNICEF encourages governments to improve climate education, awareness, and participation especially among children and young people. Personal behaviour changes are central to popularizing more sustainable choices around the globe -- including through household energy use, transportation and food choices, recycling and waste-reduction behaviours, and other climate-friendly decisions. Oftentimes, educating, and engaging children and young people leads to wider household and community changes and therefore is a critical intervention to result in wide-scale shifts. Empowering children and young people with knowledge can also lead to innovations – including through technology or creative approaches to reduce greenhouse gases or otherwise promote climate action. Their education and engagement on the issue as current change agents and future decision makers, entrepreneurs, consumers, teachers, and parents will help ensure the sustainability of our efforts.

Children and young people have an unprecedented level of interest and willingness to take and help shape climate action. UNICEF encourages national partners to involve and empower them in processes regarding the implementation and review of SDG 13 through participatory means including:

- **Actively involve children and young people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, in local and national climate change planning processes and policies** through consultation and other participatory means, and as part of ongoing efforts to make children and young people aware of these issues, inspire their positive action and expand the space for their participation in accountability mechanisms and activities. (e.g., National Climate Change Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions). This should be part of a continuum to engage children and youth regularly, meaningfully, and consistently as agents of change.<sup>3</sup>
- **Provide spaces for children, adolescents, and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including SDG 13 and other environmentally oriented Goals.** UNICEF can support this effort due to our existing work in this space and creating child-friendly education and entertainment materials such as the [Climate Action Learning Passport](#).

Additional resources available on: <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change>

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<sup>3</sup> Additional Resources: [How can climate and environment policies, plans and programmes address priority issues for and with children and young people?](#)

For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>