This policy brief summarizes the findings of a new UNICEF report, which outlines the key impacts of climate change on children in the Eastern Caribbean. Entitled *Caribbean children facing the climate crisis*, it is the regional version of Climate, Environment and Energy (CEE) Landscape Analyses for Children conducted by UNICEF in various climate or pollution hotspots around the world.

Countries and territories covered: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Photo: Destruction in the Turks and Caicos Islands following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.
REPORT SUMMARY

The Eastern Caribbean region is among the most vulnerable in the world to the impacts of climate change. Increasingly extreme weather events, shifting rainfall patterns, increasing temperatures and drought, to list a few, pose an unprecedented threat to the region’s Small Island Developing States. These countries’ vulnerability is shaped by their small size and exposure to natural hazards, but also socio-economic factors including their reliance on climate-sensitive economic sectors, i.e. tourism, agriculture and fisheries, limited resources and high levels of public debt, water insecurity, environmental fragility and unsustainable exploitation of resources. In 2017, category five hurricanes Irma and Maria inflicted catastrophic social, economic and environmental loss and damage across the region, affecting 143,000 people, including 39,000 children, and wiping out years of development gains. Under various climate projection scenarios, it is likely that such events will become more common, while the effects of slow-onset events such as rising sea levels will become increasingly felt.

As in every crisis, children face particularly acute risks. From heightened threats to their health, education, access to water and nutritious food, and freedom from violence and abuse, the report explores the multiple impacts of climate- and environment-related harm on children’s rights in the region. The poorest and most disadvantaged children are particularly vulnerable, and this represents a major concern in a region in which children are disproportionately affected by poverty. These children’s limited coping capacity is likely to be further eroded, compounding hardship and inequities. In addition, greater numbers of children may be pushed into poverty, as climate- and environment-related pressures take their toll on household and community livelihoods.

Despite these specific and heightened risks, children are largely overlooked in key regional and national climate, environmental and energy-related (CEE) strategies, policies and legislation in the Eastern Caribbean (as much as they are absent from international CEE-related frameworks). This includes consideration of their particular vulnerabilities, as well as their right to be heard and to participate meaningfully in relation to these issues. This omission is exacerbated by – and contributes to – a paucity of disaggregated data and child-specific information in this area, hindering decision-making and the ability of interventions to effectively target children and meet their needs. Notwithstanding this overarching context, certain sectoral strategies at the regional level are making strides in advancing child-sensitive action on CEE issues, particularly with respect to education and child protection. These – and a number of good practice examples at the national level – provide a positive model that can be scaled up and emulated more broadly.

► WATER: Six of the 16 most water-stressed countries in the world are located in the region, with greater impacts on children
► HEALTH: Climate change is projected to regionally increase dengue fever transmission, which primarily affects children, by a further 300%
► EDUCATION: Hurricanes Irma and Maria had a major impact on the education sector in the region. In Dominica, 83% of schools incurred damage
BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Disaster risk reduction and climate resilience in the education sector

An important regional initiative is the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI), which is the Caribbean contribution to the Worldwide Initiative for Safe Schools, designed to assist participating states to implement processes that result in safer and greener educational facilities, building on the three core pillars of the global Comprehensive School Safety Framework (see figure below).

The CSSI was officially launched during the first Caribbean Safe School Ministerial Forum in April 2017, when twelve governments (now 18) signed the Antigua and Barbuda Declaration on School Safety in the Caribbean, explicitly recognizing the region’s vulnerability to disasters and the threats that climate change and climate variability pose to the countries of the Caribbean and to the education sector in particular. Implementation of the initiative is spearheaded by CDEMA with UNICEF and other partners’ support.

Early 2019, OECS countries also adopted UNICEF-supported Design Guidelines for Disaster-Resilient Schools, to guide implementation of Pillar 1 activities.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Children and youth in the Eastern Caribbean are already facing significant and mounting risks due to the escalating impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. **Urgent measures are required across sectors to keep them safe and to enhance their resilience.**

The following policy recommendations represent a call to action for national Governments and regional institutions in the region – with the active support and participation of the international community and other partners – to devote greater attention and resources to shielding children and youth from these risks, and to upholding their rights. As a cross-cutting priority, particular attention must be paid to addressing the magnified risks faced by the most vulnerable children, and to meeting their specific needs.

**PRIORITY #1:** Urgently address the omission of children and youth in CEE and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) frameworks, mainstreaming child-specific and child-sensitive risk and vulnerability reduction strategies into relevant regional policies and plans.

**PRIORITY #2:** Scale up and mainstream a child rights-based approach across sector-based strategies and interventions that address CEE and DRR issues.

**PRIORITY #3:** Foster greater integration between CEE- and DRR-focused institutions and interventions at national and regional levels, with a view to facilitating a holistic and child-inclusive approach to resilience.

**PRIORITY #4:** Address the lack of disaggregated data, research and analysis to heighten awareness among policy-makers and other key stakeholders, and inform child-sensitive action on CEE issues.

**PRIORITY #5:** Equip children and youth with the knowledge and life skills required for resilience in a changing climate, including sustainable lifestyles.

**PRIORITY #6:** Strengthen child and youth engagement and participation with respect to CEE issues and action.

**PRIORITY #7:** Mobilize financial resources at national and regional levels to support child-sensitive interventions, and advocate for similar revisions in international climate finance mechanisms.

"**As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, let us ensure that children across the Eastern Caribbean and beyond enjoy the right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, now and for generations to come!**"

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Dr Aloys Kamuragiye, Representative, UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area.

FULL REPORT  The full report can be downloaded from www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean