

Nationally Determined Contributions 3.0: Ensuring they deliver for children

POLICY BRIEF APRIL 2025



Almost 160 million children in Europe and Central Asia are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.¹

They are affected disproportionately across almost every aspect of their health and well-being and at every stage of their development, from their mother's pregnancy to the first weeks of life, and from their school years to their young adulthood.

Half of all children in the region face frequent heatwaves, double the global average.² One in ten lives in an area that is prone to river flooding.³ Nearly every child across the region is breathing polluted air – including in their homes, schools, hospitals and playgrounds – with potentially fatal consequences. In 2021, 6,400 children died prematurely from causes related to air pollution. The vast majority – 85 per cent – died before their first birthday.⁴

These environmental threats compound existing inequities and undermine children's rights to health, education, safety and a clean environment.

In 2025, parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will submit their updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the [Paris Agreement](#). The third round of NDCs – called NDCs 3.0 – will outline countries' climate commitments for the coming years and, specifically, how they will reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. For children, the NDCs 3.0 are of critical importance as they will define how countries will reduce national emissions and adapt to

the accelerating impact of climate change. Ultimately, therefore, they will define the world children will live in. Without explicitly addressing the needs of children – and making costed investments in education, health and social protection – NDCs 3.0 cannot help to build a healthy, sustainable environment for children.

As governments prepare their NDCs 3.0, they should clearly acknowledge the disproportionate impact of climate change on children. Governments also need to ensure that they translate their recognition of children's vulnerability into action.

This entails the systematic inclusion of child-specific data and explicit references to targeted adaptation and mitigation measures across the key sectors for children: education, health, social protection and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The NDCs 3.0 need to go beyond general commitments and set out concrete investments to strengthen these services in the face of growing climate risks. In doing so, governments will take meaningful steps towards fulfilling the rights of every child to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

With countries set to submit their NDCs 3.0 in 2025, now is the moment to act – ensuring not only the health, well-being and development of children today, but the resilience of our societies and economies for generations to come.

Cover image: © UNICEF/UNI682074/Pantelia

On November 12, 2024, Theodora Kosmopoulou, a 16-year-old from Greece attending COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, gazes over the Elefsina Gulf—the place of her origins. Elefsina, an industrialized city in the Attica region, faces severe environmental and climate challenges due to its concentration of heavy industries, including oil refineries, cement factories and manufacturing plants.

What is a child-sensitive NDC?

Every NDC needs to fulfil at least three of the criteria shown below to be considered child- and youth-sensitive. These criteria address the specific risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people by including child-sensitive multisectoral commitments in child-critical sectors.

- 1. References:** the NDC includes explicit and meaningful references to children and young people, including those who are disadvantaged and marginalized.
- 2. Rights-based:** it considers children and young people as rights-holders and includes meaningful references to children's rights or intergenerational justice and equity.

- 3. Inclusive:** it identifies inclusiveness and the recognition of children and young people as important stakeholders for climate action, including in Action for Climate Empowerment.

- 4. Holistic and multisectoral:** it addresses the specific risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people by including multisectoral commitments in child-critical sectors.

Below: © UNICEF/UNI556785/Nimani

At their home in Skopje, North Macedonia. Nertena, 22, holds her young son who is suffering from bronchitis, worsened by poor air quality in their neighbourhood. March 2024.



Key facts

The integration of child-related priorities into current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs 2.0)⁵

The extent to which current NDCs include child-sensitive commitments across sectors relevant to children is illustrated below.

38%



Child-sensitive health commitments

The NDC specifically addresses or considers actions to directly improve the health of children, young people, family or community; to improve health care facilities and systems; to develop responsive primary care; or to embed environmental health in school programmes.

43%



Child-sensitive education commitments

The NDC specifically addresses or considers the educational needs of children including commitments to develop or strengthen curricula; to improve learning facilities or associated infrastructure; or to develop skills and knowledge in education staff.

30%



Child-sensitive social protection commitments

The NDC specifically addresses or considers action to alleviate poverty, including cash transfers benefitting children and young people; social insurance for children, youth or families; strengthening of social services personnel; etc.

39%



Child-sensitive water commitments

The NDC specifically addresses or considers access to water, including, for example, commitments to water infrastructure; increasing access to drinking water in households, communities or sectors on which children depend; and monitoring and managing drinking water resources.

15%



Child-sensitive sanitation commitments

The NDC specifically addresses or considers sanitation for the benefit of children and young people, including, for example, ensuring sanitation infrastructure and services are safe and resilient and increasing access to sanitation solutions in sectors on which children depend.

Examples of the integration of child-related priorities into current NDCs 2.0

Climate change education:

- **Georgia** has focused on raising climate awareness among children and youth by embedding climate change education into its national curriculum. This includes supporting youth-led climate action projects, which aim to foster environmental stewardship from an early age.
- **Kyrgyzstan** recognizes the vulnerability of children and staff in preschools and secondary schools to climate change and emergencies, and promotes energy efficiency improvements of existing public buildings.
- **Moldova's** updated NDC includes costed climate change adaptation actions in the education sector. This includes the integration of climate into the curricula.
- **North Macedonia** recognizes the important role of young people in the development and implementation of the NDC and includes social and economic considerations. This includes the impact of the proposed mitigation measures for the creation of green jobs.
- **Tajikistan** identifies education, youth and health as cross-cutting areas of the adaptation priorities in its NDC.
- **Turkmenistan's** NDC includes provisions on raising awareness of climate change issues among the younger generation, as well as adaptation and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change on children.

Health and nutrition:

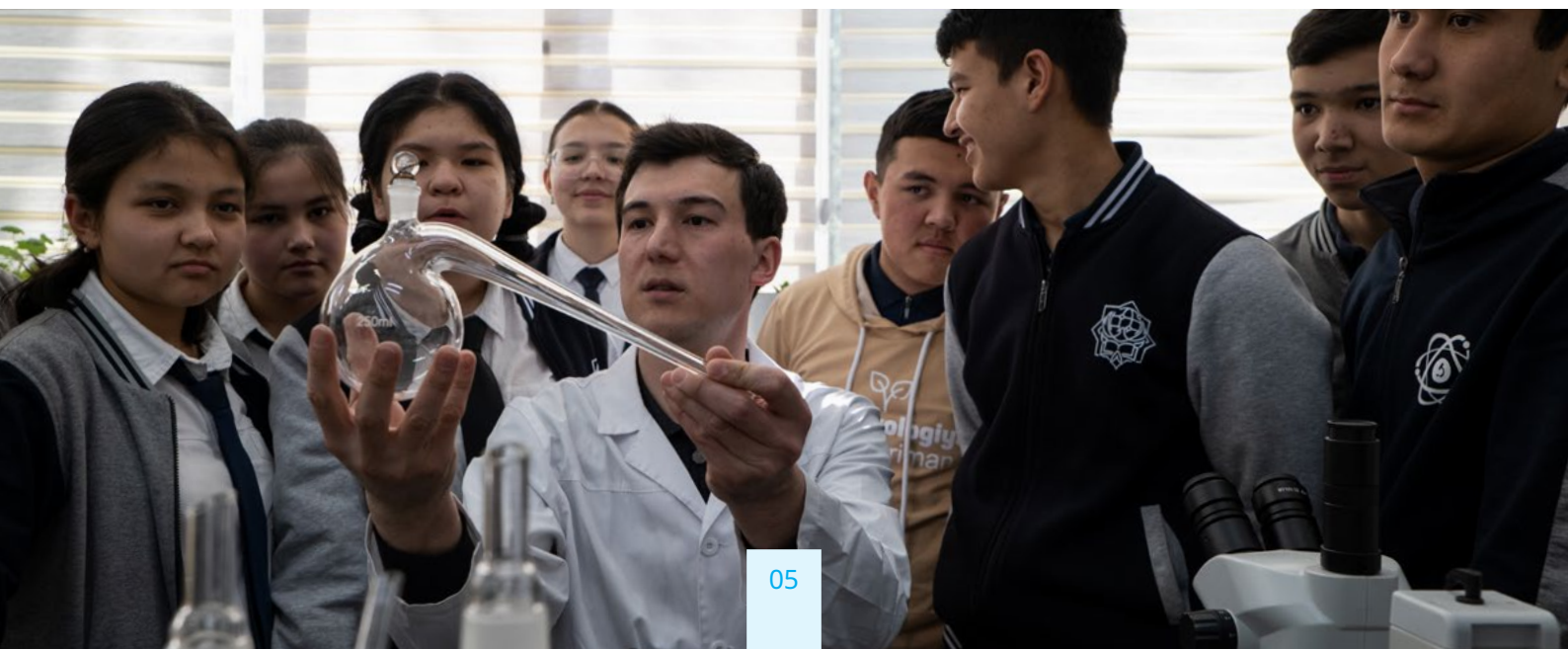
- **Kazakhstan** has committed to upgrading schools and healthcare facilities to withstand extreme weather events, ensuring that these critical infrastructures remain operational during and after climate disasters. This approach not only protects children's education and health, but also enhances community resilience.
- **Moldova** includes costed plans to address care for vulnerable population groups including elderly people, families, isolated people and people without shelter in the event of health and climate emergencies.
- **Tajikistan's** approach emphasizes improving healthcare infrastructure to cope with climate-induced health risks, with a particular focus on access to clean water and on nutrition for children and vulnerable populations. The NDC also includes plans to enhance agricultural practices to improve food security.

Social protection:

- **Albania** recognizes the importance of developing insurance schemes and social protection systems to address climate change-related disasters in its NDC.
- **Moldova** has committed to scale up its capacity to prepare and respond to disasters through increased access to mechanisms that enable early action, alongside climate risk insurance and other social safety nets. Moldova also commits to strengthen the climate resilience of rural livelihoods through social protection programmes, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups.

Below: © UNICEF/UNI549696/Nematov

11th grade students learn about the effects of various types of gas in different conditions at the Abu Ali Ibn Sino specialized school in Uzbekistan.



Aligning climate finance with the needs of children

At present, only 2.4 per cent of key multilateral climate funds are directed towards child-responsive programmes.

Governments have begun to recognize that this must be addressed. This shift is reflected in the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake (GST), concluded at COP28, which served as the formal mechanism under the Paris Agreement to assess global progress on climate action every five years. The GST evaluates collective efforts to limit global warming, enhance adaption and align climate financing. Crucially, the GST provides guidance for countries as they revise and strengthen their NDCs.

The first GST highlighted the importance of protecting the most vulnerable, including children, in climate action.⁶ It presented a critical opportunity for governments to ensure that their next NDCs would reflect the specific risks children face and the transformative potential of child-centred climate investments.

Below: © UNICEF/UNI549669/Nematov

Zulfiya Usmonova. UNICEF supported participant of the UniSat. UniSat is a competition for girls in Uzbekistan to learn about space technologies, radio electronics, programming, technologies for receiving and processing Earth images from space, and satellite meteorology.



Everyone benefits when children are prioritized

When climate policies are centred on the needs of children and young people, the benefits extend across society. Actions that strengthen social protection, education, health and WASH systems not only safeguard children's rights, but also improve the resilience and well-being of the entire community.

Despite the broad benefits, children's needs and perspectives are too often excluded from crucial climate policies and policymaking. Children are also

widely overlooked during the implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation action.

This is a missed opportunity. Children and young people are not only those most affected by climate change – they are also uniquely positioned to be drivers of change. As those closest to the consequences, they can play a critical role in identifying and implementing effective solutions – including some that even those of us with technical or policy expertise may not see.

A call to action for governments

To include the needs and vulnerabilities of children – and secure a safer, healthier and more productive future for all of society – governments should include the following action points as targeted climate change adaptation investments in their NDCs 3.0.

1. Make education systems climate-resilient

Education systems can play a critical role in equipping teachers, children, young people and communities with the knowledge, skills and values needed for the green transition. Safe, sustainable and climate-resilient infrastructure is critical for ensuring uninterrupted education for all students. The following actions are recommended.

- **Integrate climate change into educational standards and national curricula, across all subjects and grade levels**, ensuring age- and context-appropriate content that gives students a comprehensive understanding of human-made climate change mechanisms, causes, impacts and remedial and sustainable solutions.
- **Develop climate-focused educational materials**, tailored to different age groups and aligned with national education goals, while addressing the relevant climate and disaster risks faced by children and adolescents.
- **Build teacher capacities through systematic training on climate change**, equipping educators to deliver climate education effectively through the consistent use of interactive and participatory pedagogies.
- **Prioritize the expansion of STEM education to include climate science**, eco-technologies and green skills that build youth employability in the green economy and foster responsible environmental citizenship.
- **Mainstream climate adaptation and mitigation into education sector policy, plans and budgets**, making climate resilience and sustainability core parts of system-wide educational development.
- **Upgrade educational buildings and facilities to withstand climate change impacts** in line with the latest energy efficiency and infrastructural standards, energy efficient technologies (e.g. modern heating, cooling and lighting systems), window and roof improvements, and structural safety.
- **Improve indoor air quality (IAQ)** through effective ventilation, filtration and thermal control measures to safeguard children's health and learning.
- **Install renewable energy solutions, such as solar panels for electricity and hot water**, to lower operational costs while reducing CO₂ emissions.
- **Implement climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies** within school systems, including climate and disaster risk assessments and contingency planning, involving students in the implementation process.
- **Establish child-sensitive early warning mechanisms and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** to guide schools in better responding to climate-induced hazards such as heatwaves, air pollution and flooding.
- **Develop mechanisms and tools for gathering and managing data on climate change and education** – including research and learning from schools – to enable evidence-based education sector planning.
- **Empower school students to engage in community-based climate action.**

2. Strengthen environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient primary healthcare systems

Climate change is having an impact on almost every aspect of a child's health and well-being. Children are affected disproportionately by climate-related hazards, including air pollution, water scarcity, extreme heat and changing disease patterns. Governments must act urgently to strengthen primary healthcare (PHC) systems and implement climate-resilient practices in healthcare infrastructure to protect child health and prepare the health system for a changing climate. The following actions are recommended.

- **Strengthen PHC services for pregnant women, infants and children** to serve as the frontline of defense against the climate-exacerbated health risks affecting children, including respiratory diseases, waterborne infections and heat-related illnesses.
- **Transition primary health facilities to low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure and supply chains for health and nutrition.**
- **Transition households to cleaner energy sources for household cooking and heating to reduce emissions and the burden of air pollution on health outcomes** by incentivizing renewable and sustainable energy solutions, such as air-to-air heat pumps and the promotion of household energy efficiency.
- **Ensure high indoor air quality in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs)** as a targeted climate adaptation measure to protect the most vulnerable newborns.
- **Promote high pneumococcal vaccination coverage** and strengthen home-visiting programmes and public awareness campaigns to build resilience against air pollution and climate-sensitive diseases.
- **Integrate climate change and environmental health content into medical education and training**, equipping health professionals with the skills to recognize and manage climate-related health conditions.
- **Recognize the critical role of PHC in climate change adaptation** by integrating climate risk indicators to monitor children's health.
- **Invest in early warning systems**, including heat alert systems (incremental activities based on temperatures

or heat advisories issued by the national weather service or other governmental agencies that provide weather forecasts and warnings).

3. Strengthen child-sensitive, climate-responsive social protection systems

As climate change has a growing impact on vulnerable populations, governments must ensure that social protection systems are equipped to respond to climate-related shocks, particularly for the children and families at greatest risk. The following actions are recommended.

- **Integrate child-focused, shock-responsive social protection measures**, ensuring that families receive timely and adequate cash and service support before, during and after climate-induced crises.
- **Strengthen core social protection systems** by mainstreaming climate risks into policy frameworks, expanding social registries to include climate-vulnerable populations, and ensuring that social protection schemes remain accessible even in times of extreme weather events.
- **Strengthen universal child-sensitive social protection schemes** as a key mitigation and resilience investment, ensuring that children in climate-affected communities have continuous access to income support, healthcare and education.
- **Explore and adopt innovative risk-financing mechanisms, such as parametric insurance, forecast-based financing and climate contingency funds**, to ensure social protection systems have pre-positioned resources that can be rapidly deployed to protect families and children affected by extreme weather events.
- **Ensure social protection contributes to a just transition** by supporting workers and families affected by climate policies, such as shifts in energy and land use, to prevent job losses and ensure equitable adaptation strategies.
- **Align social protection with climate finance mechanisms**, advocating for greater investment in adaptive social protection within global climate funds, NDC financing strategies and bilateral cooperation agreements.



4. Ensure climate-resilient and low-carbon WASH services for children

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are essential for children's health and development and are increasingly threatened by the impacts of climate change. Governments must prioritize climate-resilient and low-carbon WASH systems that contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, ensuring the protection of children in schools, health facilities and communities. The following actions are recommended.

- **Ensure universal and equitable access to climate-resilient WASH services for children** to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on water resources, health and education.
- **Implement climate-resilient WASH infrastructure in schools, healthcare facilities and communities** to protect children during extreme climate events such as floods and droughts.
- **Promote innovative and adaptive WASH technologies and approaches** that respond to a broad range of climate-related impacts, including water scarcity, extreme temperatures, contamination, and infrastructure stress – to ensure consistent access to safe water and sanitation services.
- **Integrate WASH into climate change adaptation for education and health systems**, including contingency protocols for water outages, sanitation failures and safe hygiene practices.
- **Invest in energy-efficient and low-carbon water and sanitation systems** to reduce emissions while delivering sustainable services to children in vulnerable settings.
- **Develop and operationalize Water Safety Plans (WSPs) and Sanitation Safety Plans (SSPs)** that address climate-related risks like flooding, drought and contamination, to ensure safe drinking water and sanitation across both urban and rural areas.
- **Strengthen institutional capacity at municipal and utility levels** by equipping service providers, school administrators and health managers with tools, funding and training to deliver climate-resilient WASH services for children.
- **Support and advocate for enhanced regulatory frameworks and national WASH standards** to be aligned with climate mitigation targets, environmental health indicators and child-specific outcomes, including high air and water quality standards.

Above: © UNICEF/UNI426487/Margaryan

A boy sits in the grass outside a newly established preschool in Armenia.

5. Recognize and empower children and youth as climate stakeholders

Children and young people are among the most affected by climate change, despite contributing the least to its causes. Governments must recognize children and youth as rights-holders, stakeholders and key partners in climate action. Their meaningful participation is essential for the shaping of inclusive, just and future-focused climate policies, including the development and implementation of NDCs.

The following actions are recommended.

- **Acknowledge the disproportionate impact of climate change on children and young people**, as highlighted in the UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Index.
- **Affirm the right of children to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment**, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Comment No. 26).
- **Recognize children and youth as key partners in the development and implementation of NDCs 3.0**, ensuring their voices are central to climate decision-making.

- **Organize accessible and inclusive consultations with children and youth**, including marginalized and underrepresented groups, to gather meaningful input.
- **Host formal feedback sessions with children and young people** to present outcomes from youth-led events such as the Local and Regional Conferences of Youth (LCOY and RCOY), with a focus on contributions to NDCs 3.0.
- **Ensure that perspectives of children and youth are reflected in NDCs 3.0**, with a specific focus on the voices of marginalized groups.
- **Establish youth advisory boards** to provide ongoing input and accountability throughout the NDCs 3.0 development and implementation process.

Below: © UNICEF/UNI552846/Asymov

In March 2024, a child in the National Center for Maternal and Child Health in Bishkek breathes through a mask with a nurse next to him. There are many small children in the hospital.

References:

1. [UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Index, 2021](#)
2. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/beat-heat-2024>
3. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/focus-children-climate-change-and-environmental-degradation>
4. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/breathless-beginnings-2024>
5. [UNICEF NDCs for every child Data Platform](#)
Countries covered: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, European Union, Georgia, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.
6. <https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake>



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