

13 CLIMATE ACTION



KEY ASKS

2023 • SDG National Reviews

SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

Climate change and environmental degradation are equity issues that undermine the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged. It is more and more evident that realizing children's rights as embedded throughout the SDGs – access to economic opportunity, nutrition, health, education, equity, water, energy, and peace – are contingent on taking action to address and adapt to climate change.



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:

- **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.
- **Protecting children from the impacts of climate change** which 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.

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. 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 2016¹. This is more than the total child deaths due to Malaria, Measles and AIDS². 1 billion children (almost half of children globally) are currently highly exposed to air pollution that exceeds 35µg/m³– which is seven times the WHO global air quality guidelines³. It also affects children’s cognitive development. This is further perpetuating poverty and inequity, with the most disadvantaged children and communities often at the greatest risk. Air pollution is exacerbated by the use of fossil fuels – a key driver of climate change.
- 6. Reducing inequity to promote resilience to climate change.** The poorest children and their families are, and will be, most affected by climate change. Programmes to develop policy, 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 impacts.



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

To accelerate strategies and actions on the above priority areas for children and climate action, data is necessary. Climate change related data/evidence on areas most relevant to children is scarce, specifically on interlinkages between climate and child health, nutrition, education, displacement, migration, etc. Collecting and disaggregating SDG 13 targets and indicators is vital in understanding how and where children are being left behind in the context of addressing climate change.



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 money available to deal with climate change is both urgent and necessary. It will provide the resources to protect children from the worst impacts of climate change through adaptation and will also ensure a safer future for all future generations through low carbon development. Long-term climate finance must be distributed and targeted in such a way that those most vulnerable, such as children, benefit from adequate investment 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.



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

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

² WHO, 2017 Causes of Child Mortality

³ UNICEF, Children’s Climate Risk Index, 2021

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.⁴
- **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](#).

⁴ 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>