Building Climate Resilience with and for Children

A report by:

KIDS RIGHTS

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The International Children's Peace Prize
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About KidsRights

KidsRights is an international children's rights organization, founded in 2003 and based in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, that strives for a world where every child can access their rights and realize their full potential. We see children and young people as changemakers with the power to move the world, and work alongside them to command global attention for children's rights, acting as a catalyst for lasting change. KidsRights is the founder of: the International Children's Peace Prize - the world's most important youth prize; the KidsRights Index - the first and the only annual ranking that measures how children's rights are respected worldwide and to what extent countries are committed to improving the rights of children; and the State of Youth - a global grassroots movement created for youth, by youth (ages 12–29).

About the International Children's Peace Prize

The International Children's Peace Prize – the world's most important youth prize, is awarded annually to a child who has made an exceptional difference for the rights of children, anywhere in the world. An initiative of KidsRights Foundation, the International Children's Peace Prize was launched in Rome during the 2005 World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates chaired by Mikhail Gorbachev. Since then, each year the prize has been awarded by a Nobel Peace Laureate.

Every year, KidsRights Foundation publishes a report on the theme of the winner of the International Children's Peace Prize to highlight the need to prioritize and address specific children's rights concerns. This report is based on the theme of the 2026 winner of the International Children's Peace Prize, Francisco Vera Manzanares (17 years old) from Colombia, for his work on climate justice and environmental peace.

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A Snapshot

Children have a right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment, but they are already experiencing serious consequences of climate change that directly affect their right to life, health, education, protection and participation, among others. Children are disproportionately affected by extreme climate and weather events and are set to endure an escalating climate crisis throughout their lives.

Nearly all children in the world are exposed to climate hazards



1.2 billion children are exposed to extreme heat



Heat-related neonatal deaths higher by 46% in 29 low-and middle-income countries.



1.8 billion children exposed to droughts



21,000+ climate induced child displacements every day



Education of 171 million children disrupted in 2025 in 97 countries



Increase in

- Child marriages
- Child poverty
- Child labor
- Child malnutrition
- Educational disruptions

By 2050

- All children will be exposed to extreme heat
- additional 40 million children will be stunted
- additional 28 million children will be wasted

Climate policies and actions must adopt a child-centric approach to resilience, including by prioritizing the sectors children rely on the most and directly addressing their heightened and unique vulnerabilities. Children should be meaningfully involved in climate decision-making at the national, regional and international levels to ensure their voices are heard and their concerns

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1. Introduction

Over recent decades, extreme climate and weather events have increased in intensity and frequency, a trend directly attributable to human influence on global warming.[1] Climate change is a present reality, with its devastating impacts evident across every country and region.

We have already lived through the three warmest years on record (2023-2025),[2] with 2024 being the warmest year and with no immediate relief in sight. Based on current government efforts and pledges, global warming is projected to exceed the Paris Agreement's long-term limit of 1.5°C,[3] resulting in a further increase in extreme weather events. The European Commission has now warned the EU member states to prepare for a global warming trajectory of 3°C by 2100.[4] Considering these developments, there is a need to focus climate adaptation and mitigation efforts on limiting the impacts on vulnerable groups.

While the direct consequences of rising global temperatures affect everyone, it is pertinent to highlight their disproportionate and prolonged impact on children, who face direct consequences of climate change even though they contribute the least to its causes.

Children are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts due to biological and socio-economic factors. Their vulnerability is compounded by several intersecting and interconnected factors which operate at individual, household and national levels, including gender, disability, geographical location, migration status, poverty, armed conflicts, access to safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services and robust social protection systems, among others.

This report provides an overview of the disproportionate impact of extreme climate and weather events on children's rights, highlights powerful examples of child and youth-led climate action, and advocates for globally integrating child-sensitive climate resilience measures with children's direct involvement as agents of change.

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2. The disproportionate impact of climate change on children's rights

Nearly all children in the world are exposed to at least one climate-related hazard.[5] It is reported that approximately half of the children globally (1.1 billion children) are exposed to at least three overlapping climate hazards.[6] Such an exposure leads to a cascading impact on children's rights provided under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Recognizing the adverse impacts of climate change on child rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No. 26. It highlights the need to address the effects of environmental degradation on children's rights and clarifies States' obligations to address environmental harm under the CRC.[7] The Committee on the Rights of the Child concretely established children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, implicit in the CRC, through a formal interpretation of the rights to life, survival and development, health, an adequate standard of living, and education.

This section provides an overview of impacts on these children's rights due to extreme weather and climate events related to climate change.

2.1. Life, survival and development (Article 6, CRC)

In the previous two decades (2001-2019), due to climate change, **heat-related neonatal deaths were reportedly higher by 46% in 29 low- and middle-income countries**.[8] Studies also suggest that climate change may result in an increase in paediatric morbidity in Europe.[9]

Heat-related neonatal deaths higher by 46% in 29 low-and middle-income countries.



A recent scoping review examined the relationship between climate change and malnutrition among children under five. It has established that climate change events, such as droughts and excessive floods, increase child malnutrition through reduced agricultural productivity, which is further exacerbated by socio-economic factors such as poverty.[10]

Climate change is increasingly linked to stunting among children.[11] By 2050, climate change is projected to result in an additional 40 million children being stunted (low height for age) and an additional 28 million children being wasted (low weight for height).[12]

2.2. Highest attainable standard of health (Article 24, CRC)



Extreme climate and weather events have serious implications on children's health, reflected in an increase in respiratory and infectious diseases, heat illnesses, and child mortality.[13]

Climate change contributes to water scarcity through increasing droughts, unpredictable weather patterns and severe, long-lasting natural disasters. **1.8 billion children are exposed to droughts**,[14] while 1 in 3 children live in areas with high or extremely high-water scarcity.[15]

2.3. An adequate standard of living (Article 27, CRC)

1.2 billion children are directly exposed to extreme heat (temperatures over 35°C).[16] By 2050, all children in the world will experience high intensity and high frequency heatwaves.[17]

Further, over **21,000 child displacements occur every day due to climate hazards** (2016-2023).[18] Such children face barriers to access education and are also at a heightened risk of being trafficked to other countries, which raises further child protection concerns.



2.4. Education (Articles 28 and 29, CRC)

Children's education has been consistently at risk due to climate events. They are facing severe immediate and long-term repercussions for children's educational access and learning outcomes.



The **education of 171 million children was disrupted** by climate-related events in 2025 across 97 countries, out of which nearly 36 million children faced delayed return to as schools were damaged or used as shelters.[19] 242 million children in 85 countries faced disruption to their schooling in 2024.[20]

A further 2 million children faced a risk of dropping out due to droughts, and at least 9 million out-of-school children due to climate events may be missing from the data in conflict-affected countries.[21]

2.5. Children's socio-economic vulnerability to climate change

The far-reaching consequences of climate change on children's rights are further multiplied due to socio-economic factors. Given that almost 80% of multidimensionally poor people face at least one climate hazard (high heat, drought, floods or air pollution),[22] and more than half of poor people are children,[23] such children face the greatest burden of climate change.

Climate stressors directly impact children's protection rights (Articles 19, 32 and 35, CRC). For instance, extreme climate events are linked to an increase in child marriages in many countries,[24] most prominently among regions and communities affected by droughts.[25]

Children are also prone to dropping out of school due to climate-induced resource constraints as households reduce educational expenditure and rely on children to generate additional income for survival.[26] In such situations, girls are also more likely to face reduced access to education.[27] As explained in this section, extreme climate and weather events act as a threat multiplier to child rights, driving an increase in extreme and multidimensional childhood poverty.[28]

This evidence of the disproportionate impact of climate events on children's rights highlights the need for countries to prioritize the development and implementation of child-sensitive climate resilience measures. These efforts must be carried out with meaningful participation of children and young people to account for their lived experiences and perspectives. The following section outlines concrete examples of child-and youth-led climate action and policies at the national, regional, and international levels.

3. Children and young people in climate action and policymaking

Children's participation in the context of climate change directly relates to their involvement in policymaking and governance aimed at mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Children have a right to be heard (Article 12, CRC) in all decision-making processes relating to climate action and policies.[29]

Countries develop Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to address climate change concerns and work towards the goals of the Paris Agreement – a legally binding international agreement on climate change. However, in the latest NDCs only 55% of countries identify children as a vulnerable group.[30] Further, only **30% of countries identify children as drivers of change**, which is also reflected in the child participation levels in developing the NDCs as only 27% of the NDCs are reportedly developed with children's involvement.[31]



By excluding children's participation from such critical climate action plans, countries are rendering invisible children's experiences and undervaluing their inputs in building climate resilience. A child-rights based approach to climate policymaking requires countries to recognize children as rights-holders and not just as passive recipients.

According to the results of a recent global preferendum conducted by the State of Youth, 50% of young people viewed themselves as being responsible for creating a healthier and more sustainable future, second only to governments (52%).[32] These results suggest that young people are willing to take action and shoulder responsibility for a sustainable future.

Children and young people are in fact spearheading climate action initiatives, advocating for the inclusion of their voices and experiences in climate policymaking, and undertaking mitigation and adaptation efforts to tackle the adverse impacts of climate change.

3.1. In Focus: Winner of the International Children's Peace Prize 2026

Francisco Vera Manzanares (17 years, Colombia)

Francisco Vera Manzanares founded Guardians for Life in Colombia in 2019, when he was only nine years old. He treats environmental collapse as a violation of children's rights and puts climate justice at the center of the wider climate movement. What began as a sit-in organized by six friends is now an active network of more than 1,400 children and young people across Colombia. Through his organization, Francisco has produced tangible results with more than 5,000 trees planted and his campaigns reaching more than 50,000 people. Francisco's work shows that children are not waiting to inherit a safer world. They are building it now.

Francisco was awarded the 2026 International Children's Peace Prize for placing children's rights at the heart of climate justice. His efforts include raising awareness, engaging in political advocacy at every level, and championing children as citizens of today, not of tomorrow. He mobilized more than 42,000 signatures to advocate for a climate emergency declaration in Bogotá and a ban on single-use plastics in Colombia.

Francisco's environmental activism has come at a serious cost. Death threats have forced him to flee Colombia and seek refuge in Spain, yet he continues to speak out for the environment and the safety of environmental defenders. Notably, Francisco campaigned for Colombia to ratify the Escazú Agreement - a Latin American and Caribbean treaty on environmental democracy and the world's first legally binding agreement with specific protections for environmental human rights defenders. Colombia ratified the treaty in 2024.

Francisco was the first child to address Colombia's Congress and Constitutional Court. He later served as a Child Advisor to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, where he helped shape General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and climate change.

Francisco is now scaling his movement internationally by forging strategic partnerships with governments, international organizations and schools, so that children's voices are built into climate action and human rights decision-making.



"Let us not allow history to remember us as those who permitted an attack on life! All children around the world have the right to live on a healthy, clean, dignified, and peaceful planet."

Francisco Vera Manzanares, International Children's Peace Prize Winner 2026

3.2. Child and youth-led climate action

Many more children and young people around the world are stepping up their climate action efforts through State of Youth – a global youth-led movement created for youth, by youth – an initiative of KidsRights Foundation.

Some of the State of Youth Chapter projects are featured in this report, showcasing their efforts to raise awareness about climate justice and lead the response to the climate crisis.

Speak Out Youth, Indonesia



Speak Out Youth Indonesia is a State of Youth Chapter run by chapter leader Alya Sabira. Under the project 'Climate Warrior', the Chapter developed its own Climate Warrior learning module and took it into 21 schools across three cities in Indonesia. Students gained knowledge, practical tools, and campaign skills to design and run their own climate activities. The Chapter has also developed supporting fact sheets on climate and gender.

Alya's project reached 160 students directly and around 9,000 people indirectly. Nine student-led activities received funding and support to go ahead.

State of Youth @ Bulawayo, Zimbabwe & Mauritius



Thuma Mina, meaning "Send Me," is a project of *State of Youth @ Bulawayo* which focuses on climate justice, environmental sustainability, education and human rights. Led by Alwande Moyo, this State of Youth Chapter works in both Zimbabwe and Mauritius, to address the common challenges climate change poses for young people across Africa.

For Alwande, climate justice is not only about reducing emissions or protecting the environment. It is about recognizing who is most affected by climate change, who has the resources to adapt, and whose voices are included in decisions about the future. This matters most in communities facing drought, water insecurity, and food insecurity.

Alwande has brought youth perspectives to the UN Civil Society Forum on drought and climate change. He has organized climate justice symposiums, awareness sessions and educational engagements, reaching more than 10,000 young people, from primary school learners to university students. Sessions conducted by his Chapter cover aspects relating to climate science, unequal impact of climate change on vulnerable communities, adaptation and mitigation, sustainable lifestyles, and youth participation in decision-making. A key part of this Chapter's approach is training facilitators so that climate education continues through peer-led awareness.

Revivals Egypt



Revivals Egypt is a State of Youth Chapter led by Yasin Ahmed working across the Sustainable Development Goals, with climate and environmental action at its core. The Chapter addresses climate change in a local context with the understanding that Alexandria's environmental challenges and future resilience directly affect its young residents.

Through his Chapter, Yasin has built a youth community in Alexandria around sustainability and social impact. The Chapter raises awareness and gives young people ways to express ideas, develop solutions, and take ownership of change. It also shows how environmental justice connects with health, education, inequality, technology, and community resilience.

Yasin's work shows that climate work does not belong only to large institutions. Young people can organize projects, advocate for causes, and partner with organizations themselves.

State of Youth is a global youth movement and digital platform where young people aged 12 to 29 connect, learn, and create change in their communities and beyond.

By bringing together children and young people from around the world, State of Youth creates opportunities to share ideas, develop solutions, and take action.

4. Recommendations

Children are already experiencing serious consequences of climate change that directly affect their right to life, health, education, protection and participation, among others. With the projected increase in global warming, and the resulting extreme climate and weather events, it is essential to adopt a child-rights based approach in developing climate action policies and implementing climate resilience measures, in line with the States' obligations under the CRC.

KidsRights calls on all countries to:

Actively facilitate the meaningful involvement of children in climate policymaking and decision-making

- Inform children about climate change, adaptation and mitigation measures in an accessible manner, including by integrating climate change education in school curriculum, conducting public awareness campaigns and workshops, among others.
- Include children at all levels of climate policymaking, including municipal, regional and national levels.
- Facilitate the participation of children and young people in the development of Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement.

Adopt and implement child-sensitive climate resilience measures

- Recognize children's specific needs, overlapping and unique vulnerabilities in the context of climate change.
- Evaluate climate policies and actions against the best interests of the child principle.
- Ensure that climate resilience measures, including efforts aimed at food and water security, can address the specific challenges faced by children.
- Adapt the education, health and child protection systems, services and infrastructure to provide unhindered and inclusive access to all children, including children with disabilities, Indigenous children, girl children, and migrant and displaced children.
- Adopt child-sensitive budget tagging in national adaptation plans and budgets to consistently track and evaluate the adequacy of the allocations.

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