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HUMAN RIGHTS
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Impacts on health

Heat-related impacts: Higher temperatures and more frequent heat waves will contribute to increases in heat-related deaths. In people aged over 65 years, this is projected to result in 38,000 additional deaths per year by 2030 and 100,000 by 2050. The largest impacts will be felt in South-East Asia. Heatwaves also contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular disease, and pose a health risk for people working outdoors or under ineffectively climate-controlled conditions.

Natural disasters: Climate change contributes to the increasing frequency and intensity of hurricanes, heatwaves, flooding, landslides, drought and wildfires. These events are associated with health impacts like injury, disability, loss of crops, and damage to water and sanitation facilities with resultant increased transmission of vector-borne diseases. Between 2005 and 2015, 1.5 billion people were affected by disasters.

Diseases: Climate change-related damage to sanitation infrastructure can lead to outbreaks of water and insect-borne diseases. Climate change may also lengthen the transmission season and expand the geographic range of certain vector-borne diseases. More than half of the world's population lives in an area where *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, the principal vector for zika, dengue and chikungunya, are present. WHO estimates climate change impacts may result in 48,000 additional deaths from diarrhoeal disease for children under 15 years and 60,000 additional deaths from malaria by the year 2030, mostly in Africa and South-East Asia.

Nutrition: Climate change affects crop yields, livelihood, income, and access to food, water and sanitation. Elevated CO₂ levels which cause climate change also affect the protein, mineral and vitamin content of many staple food crops. The World Bank estimated that a 2°C increase in average global temperature could result in over 3 million additional deaths from malnutrition each year. Undernutrition also contributes to higher incidences of morbidity and mortality from diseases such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, malaria and measles.

CLIMATE CHANGE: PROTECTING PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO HEALTH

WHO describes some of the health risks posed by climate change as more intense heatwaves and fires; increased prevalence of food-, water and vector-borne diseases; increased likelihood of undernutrition; and lost work capacity in vulnerable populations. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change may cause 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress alone. Additional risks include: breakdown in food systems, displacement, forced migration and violent conflict associated with resource scarcity and exacerbation of poverty. It is estimated that climate change could contribute to an average global income decline of 23% by 2100 imposing a burden on Governments struggling to allocate limited resources to fulfil human rights obligations. **Climate change endangers the underlying determinants of health at every level, acting as a threat multiplier.** The protection of human health and well-being in the context of climate change is contingent upon the availability of quality essential services without discrimination. A rights-based approach is vital to strengthen international, regional and national policy, and to promote long-term human health and sustainable development.

Mental health: People who experience the loss of homes or loved ones, or are exposed to life-threatening situations, face high risks of developing anxiety-related conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Slower and more gradual negative effects on the environment, social support systems, cultural traditions and infrastructure also has an impact on mental health. One study found that prolonged drought can lead to increasing farmer suicides, along with impaired mental health and stress.

People in vulnerable situations are more at risk:

Marginalized populations are especially vulnerable to climate change. Negative impacts are disproportionately felt by the poor, women, children, migrants, persons with disabilities, older persons, minorities and indigenous peoples. Communities living in low-lying coastal lands, small island developing States, high mountains, deserts and other delicate ecosystems face substantial risks of displacement. Climate-related shocks could result in an additional 100 million people living in extreme poverty by 2030. Health expenditures may go up for those who can least afford it, exacerbating the vicious cycle of poverty.

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

By analysing inequalities and seeking to redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power, a rights-based approach seeks to fulfil human rights for all. Rights holders and their entitlements must be identified to strengthen their capacity to make claims and participate in decision-making. The obligations of duty bearers must also be clarified to ensure accountability. This type of approach to climate change has the potential to address cross-cutting issues relating to health, sustainable development and natural resource management, while empowering the most marginalized. Efforts should capitalize on climate and health co-benefits that lead to direct reductions in the burden of ill-health, enhance community resilience, alleviate poverty and address global inequity. These could include measures that: reduce local emissions of air pollutants through improved energy efficiency and cleaner energy sources or promote active transport systems leading to lower emissions and better health; provide access to reproductive health services and family planning. In the Philippines, the NGO PATH worked to promote an integrated approach to sexual and reproductive health and climate action, through meetings with policy makers and other stakeholders and a storytelling project designed to highlight the lived health experiences of climate-affected women.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

What can we do?

Take more ambitious measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change under the Paris Agreement. Plans should be transparently financed and designed in consultation with affected groups. Impact assessments should ensure that climate actions respect all human rights, particularly the right to health.

Promote effective monitoring of climate action. Specific indicator frameworks should be developed to track the impacts of climate change across demographic groups and to inform inclusive, effective and rights-compliant climate action.

Develop resilient health systems and infrastructure, including for water and sanitation. Promote universal health coverage and social protection floors, including in emergency responses, paying special attention to the needs of vulnerable populations and ensuring that early-warning information is publicly available and easily accessible.

Health should be a priority for investment in climate action. Climate action should target opportunities to achieve climate and health co-benefits that lead to direct reductions in the burden of ill-health, enhance community resilience and alleviate poverty.

Enhance cooperation on the basis of the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibility to ensure adequate funding of, and research into, adaptation and mitigation efforts. Specific measures could include equitable access to technology, including, if necessary, the lowering of intellectual property standards and facilitation of technology transfer and the creation of a special climate justice fund with contributions from both the public and private sectors.

Strengthen mechanisms to address climate-related harms. All persons should have access to effective remedies for climate-related harms including impacts on their health and wellbeing. However, persons and communities seeking climate justice and accountability from the public and private sectors may be unable to fully exercise their rights due to costs and other barriers. Governments, National Human Rights Institutions and other actors can combine analysis and action to promote remedies for individual violations of human rights and systematic deficiencies relating to climate change.

Mobilize the human rights machinery to monitor climate commitments, including the Universal Periodic Review.

Contact: right2environment@ohchr.org
Analytical study: undocs.org/en/A/HRC/32/23
Resolution 29/15: undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/29/15



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