**Save the Children’s submission on Human rights and climate change**

Save the Children welcomes the opportunity to submit its contributions to the research and report on Human rights and climate change, on the analytical study on the impact of loss and damage, which the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is developing. We see this research and report as crucial for driving forward the call to recognise and implement children’s right to a healthy environment and for [establishing child-responsiveness in the Loss and Damage Fund](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Climate-Justice_-Loss-and-Damage-Finance-for-Children-1.pdf/) and of wider loss and damage funding arrangements.

**1. Please describe through concrete examples and stories the impacts of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights in your country. Please indicate whether the impact was exceptional or whether an example of many similarly situated cases. Please estimate the number of cases that may be similar in your country**.

Approximately 1 billion children live in one of 33 countries classified as being at extremely high risk to the impacts of climate change[[1]](#footnote-2). Last year, by November 2023, more than 700,000 people were displaced across the Horn of Africa[[2]](#footnote-3) due to flash floods.  In these countries children face disproportionate exposure to multiple shocks in climate, environmental, political and economic events, combined with high vulnerability due to inadequate availability, quality, equity and sustainability of key and essential services for children. Loss and damage caused by the climate crisis – such as the loss of land, life, livelihoods or cultural heritage – is one of the greatest intergenerational injustices that children face today. Climate-induced loss and damage threatens the rights of children today and in the future, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 26 from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child[[3]](#footnote-4).

The floods in Pakistan in 2022 illustrate the harsh realities children face. The country is still recovering from the large-scale floods, where more than 500 children were killed and some 3.5 million children displaced. The aftermath has left many without secure livelihoods and access to critical services such as education; Save the Children estimated that at least 18,590 schools were damaged or destroyed by the floods. Despite the scale of impacts in Pakistan, this experience is not unique. Consultations across several countries, conducted by Save the Children and UNICEF, captured the views and experiences of children who faced and witnessed similar cases to Pakistan. Benjamin, 17, from Belgium said: ‘The summer of 2021, there were very big floods in Europe and a good friend of mine died in those floods…Last year when I was at COP27, I was talking to many activists from the Global South and was hearing how badly climate change affects them. In Europe, we have the support system and resources, and there’s almost nothing like that in the Global South. So, I think, there is a lot to be done about addressing losses and damages.’[[4]](#footnote-5)

**2. Please describe any relevant quantitative and qualitative data as well as mechanisms and tools to measure, monitor, report on, and evaluate the impacts of loss and damage, including from extreme weather and slow-onset events, on the full enjoyment of human rights. Please take into account, inter alia, the disproportionate effects on women and girls, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, persons living in poverty and others in vulnerable situations.**

Globally, 774 million children face the dual threat of poverty and climate emergency[[5]](#footnote-6) which is directly impacting their rights, with nearly every child exposed to at least one climate or environmental shock. Specifically:

* 920 million children are highly exposed to water scarcity.
* 820 million children are highly exposed to heatwaves.
* 330 million children are highly exposed to riverine flooding and 240 million children are highly exposed to coastal flooding[[6]](#footnote-7).

Indigenous children are particularly vulnerable to climate-induced losses and damages, as many are living in impoverished communities where Indigenous Peoples account for one-third of the 900 million people living in extreme poverty in rural areas[[7]](#footnote-8).

The data shows the scale at which the climate crisis is leaving children highly vulnerable to extreme weather and slow-onset events. This has already gravely impacted children’s right to protection where our estimates show that in 2023 at least 12,000 people (30% more than in 2022) lost their lives due to flooding, wildfires, cyclones, storms and other extreme weather events globally[[8]](#footnote-9). According to UNICEF riverine floods are the hazard likely to account for the most child displacements in the future, with an average of about 3.2 million children displaced every year. This would represent up to 96 million children displaced over the next 30 years[[9]](#footnote-10).

Projections on access to clean water and nutritious food estimate that by 2030 an additional 7.5 million children below the age of 5 will be moderately or severely stunted because of climate change impacts[[10]](#footnote-11). Where the climate crisis is threatening food production around the world and thus potentially undermining children’s development and survival.

As the impacts of climate-related loss and damage increase, children face additional barriers to accessing their rights such as the right to health and education through both direct and indirect pathways. Relevant data shows that ‘the climate crisis is impacting the education of 40 million children every year’[[11]](#footnote-12). Slow onset events as a result of the climate crisis such as increased temperatures also affect a child’s ability to learn and access safe, quality education[[12]](#footnote-13).

The impacts of the climate crisis on livelihoods also have implications for children’s access to education and health services. Children, especially girls, may be taken out of school when a household can no longer afford school fees or to compensate for unpaid domestic labour when other members of the household migrate elsewhere in search of livelihood opportunities, or due to other instances such as injury or loss of life in a climate-related disaster. Climate-related disruptions to education and health services also significantly hinder girls’ access, with data suggesting that by 2025 if current trends continue, climate change will be a contributing factor to preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education each year12. This too affects and restricts girls’ access to comprehensive Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) education. The impact on livelihoods demonstrates how girls are disproportionately affected by climate-related loss and damage. Not only may they be taken out of school for domestic labour, but resource-poor families may resort to unhealthy coping strategies to relieve economic burden, by marrying their daughters in exchange for a bride price or as a means to reduce the number of household members. An analysis by Save the Children estimates that almost 9 million girls face extreme risk of climate-related disasters and are subject to child marriage each year[[13]](#footnote-14) .

Regarding mechanisms used to measure and report on, Save the Children estimates climate risk by the share of children estimated to experience at least one extreme climate event per year (wildfires, crop failures, droughts, river floods, heatwaves, and tropical cyclones). This is based on an analysis using the largest multi-model climate impact projections database available to date as part of the Inter-Sectoral Impact Model Intercomparison Project phase 2b (ISIMIP2b). The analysis then aggregated the child population per grid in which an extreme climate event was projected to occur in the ISIMIP data. To then establish comparability to child marriage, it was aggregated at a subnational level, using spatial boundaries to estimate the proportion of children in each region who are affected by at least one extreme climate event per year. Our sample covered 140 countries for which approximately 11 million children get married per year. For estimating girls affected by at least one extreme climate event and being married as a child, we estimated the proportion of climate-affected children as well as women (20-24 years) married before age 18 in 1,2000 regions (1,152 subnational regions and 48 nation states)[[14]](#footnote-15).

**3. Please describe any specific measures, including public policies, legislation, practices, strategies, or institutional arrangements that your Government has undertaken or plans to undertake at a national, sectoral or sub-national level, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, to avert, minimize and address loss and damage, including equity-based approaches and solutions. Please also identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability, including means of implementation.**

The Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action is a commitment for accelerating inclusive, child and youth-centred climate policies and action at national and global level. By signing the declaration governments commit to advocating for the global recognition and fulfilment of children’s right to a healthy environment, through their participation, capacity strengthening and investment. Though the declaration is not specific to loss and damage, by calling for frameworks, policies and legislation to preserve children’s right to a healthy environment, where appropriate, it serves as a good basis for formulating equity-based approaches and solutions when addressing the impacts of the climate crisis.   Thus far 44 countries have signed the declaration including Germany, Nigeria, Libya, Spain, South Africa and Mexico[[15]](#footnote-16).

Regarding relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability the adoption of *General comment 26 on* *children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change[[16]](#footnote-17)* (GC26) is the first international instrument recognising children’s right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and establishing the impact of environmental degradation and climate change on child rights. It is an essential authoritative guide that recognises inaction on the climate crisis as a child rights’ crisis. It provides a benchmark to hold States that have ratified the Convention accountable through the CRC reporting mechanisms as well as other mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). GC26 explicitly refers to loss and damage and acknowledges it as a third pillar of climate action alongside mitigation and adaptation. In paragraph 106 it reads ‘*States are encouraged to take note that, from a human rights perspective, loss and damage are closely related to the right to remedy and the principle of reparations, including restitution, compensation and rehabilitation’*. It goes on to highlight that States should undertake measures for the provision of financial and technical assistance for addressing loss and damage that have an impact of the enjoyment of rights under the Convention.

The GC26 also calls on States to take other measures such as child rights impact assessments for all environment-related legislation, policies and projects, regulations, budgets or other decisions. States are also expected to periodically report to the UN Committee on progress made in protecting children’s environmental rights[[17]](#footnote-18).

**4. Please identify and share examples of promising practices and critical challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the full enjoyment of human rights in the context of loss and damage, including examples that highlight multilateral cooperation and approaches, at global and regional levels, including equity-based approaches and solutions.**

The 60th session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation will hold an expert dialogue on the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and on relevant policy solutions in this regard. The dialogue will address and promote the fulfilment of children’s rights through putting forward evidence and data that include loss and damage related incidents, to understand what action is required within the climate negotiations process to address the needs of this highly vulnerable group.

The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund is a promising start, whilst it is still being designed, Save the Children and coalition partners identified examples of Multilateral Climate Fund policies, strategies and plans that have child-responsive content[[18]](#footnote-19). Such examples may provide opportunities for addressing gaps in key policies and key strategies from a child rights perspective, and inspiration for how the Loss and Damage fund should seek to include child responsiveness. For example, the *GCF Revised and Environmental and Social Policy (2 021)* contains a guiding principle on Human Rights and states that the GCF require robust environmental and social due diligence to be applied, in order to ensure that supported activities don’t cause, promote, contribute, perpetuate or exacerbate adverse human rights impacts. Another GCF funded policy titled *Updated Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan, 2022-2023* reflects Parties commitment to adaptation plans being ‘gender-responsive’ and respect, promote and consider obligations to human rights, right to health, right of Indigenous peoples and local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities, right to development and gender quality, and intergenerational equity. Despite some positive progress, overall the climate finance landscape is far from where it needs to be for meeting children’s needs. The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund is an opportunity to create positive practice that could filter through to other climate finance bodies and processes.

However, the operationalisation the Loss and Damage fund has already been faced with obstacles with regards to human rights. We have seen unmet pledges and the removal of the majority of human rights references in the Global Stocktake Final outcome text section on loss and damage. Language on rights being absent from essential policy will thus make it difficult to ensure that human rights including children's rights are protected in loss and damage funding at project level. Additionally, a lack of data makes it challenging to assess effective responses to loss and damage since data are not routinely recorded[[19]](#footnote-20).

**5. Please provide specific recommendations, if possible, on how to address the critical challenges that have been identified, including actions to be taken at country, regional, and global levels, as well as by different groups of stakeholders, Governments, development agencies, financing institutions, and others.**

The Loss and Damage Fund and wider loss and damage funding arrangements must place children and their rights at their centre, given children’s vulnerability to both economic and non-economic loss and damage impacts. We recommend the following actions to ensure this ([see here for more detail](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Climate-Justice_-Loss-and-Damage-Finance-for-Children-1.pdf/)):

**1. Incorporating child rights as a guiding principle.**Loss and Damage finance needs to be child-responsive where children’s rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, inform all financing decisions with the recognition of differing age and gendered impacts, as well as children’s own views and recommendations.

**2. Meaningfully engaging children in the process, including the design, monitoring and implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund and loss and damage financing**. To do this, children, locally-led organisations and others affected should be recognised as active participants in decision-making processes on loss and damage. Governments and other relevant stakeholders should facilitate their safe and meaningful participation in these processes and take their views and recommendations into account.

**3. Taking account of children’s particular needs and unique vulnerabilities**. Needs assessments for loss and damage must take into consideration existing vulnerabilities such as child poverty and inequality, and capacities specific to different groups of children which include, but aren’t limited to, girls and children discriminated against on the basis of SOGIESC; Indigenous children; children with disabilities; displace, migrant and refugee children; and children affected by conflict. The response to loss and damage needs to be informed by existing inequalities and disaggregated data, by age, gender, migration status and disability status, at the minimum. Financial support should also be provided in order to strengthen the collection and disaggregation of data in countries that are facing high climate risk.

**4. Ensuring access to funding for children and their families**. Children who are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, including child- and girl-led organisations must have timely access to financial support through the Loss and Damage Fund and other loss and damage financing. There should also be technical support available to access child-responsive climate finance through existing regional mechanisms and implementing agencies.

**5. Ensuring accountability and access to justice for children**. Access to effective grievance mechanisms and remedies must be granted to children and children’s organisations if the activities of the Loss and Damage Fund or loss and damage funding arrangements violate children’s rights. Furthermore, to ensure justice for children and families, loss and damage finance mechanisms must have effective environmental and social safeguards.

**6. Investing in children:** rebuilding/recovering children’s critical services such as education, health, nutrition, WASH, social protection and child protection. Significant amounts of finance for loss and damage must be directed at these child-critical social services as well as essential services for younger children, which should be equitable and inclusive in its delivery. Additionally, climate finance for loss and damage should be used for investing in adaptive social protection systems.

1. UNICEF, Save the Children, et al., (2023), [*Loss and Damage Finance for Children*](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Climate-Justice_-Loss-and-Damage-Finance-for-Children-1.pdf/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Save the Children, (2023), [Horn of Africa: Over 100 killed and 700,000 displaced by El Nino rains](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/east-africa-over-100-killed-700000-displaced-by-el-nino-rains-) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Committee on the Rights of the Child, (2023), [*CRC/C/GC/26: General comment No. 26 (2023) on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change | OHCHR*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crccgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Quotes directly from Save the Children’s and partners Loss and Damage Finance for Children report [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Save the Children, (2022), [*Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis*](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/generation-hope-2-4-billion-reasons-to-end-the-global-climate-and-inequality-crisis/)  [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. UNICEF, Save the Children, et al., (2023), [*Loss and Damage Finance for Children*](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Climate-Justice_-Loss-and-Damage-Finance-for-Children-1.pdf/)  [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. FAO, (2021), [*Indigenous peoples’ food systems: Insights on sustainability and resilience in the front line of climate change*](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/items/2ce9de7a-590d-49ba-8652-d7968ee6c51c)  [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Save the Children, (2023), [2023 IN REVIEW: CLIMATE DISASTERS CLAIMED 12,000 LIVES GLOBALLY IN 2023](https://www.savethechildren.net/news/2023-review-climate-disasters-claimed-12000-lives-globally-2023)  [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. UNICEF, (2023), [*Climate displacement report*](https://www.unicef.org/media/145951/file/Climate%20displacement%20report%20(English).pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. WHO, (2014), [*Quantitative Risk Assessment of the Effects of Climate Change on Selected Causes of Death, 2030s and 2050s*](https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/134014/9789241507691_eng.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Education Cannot Wait, (2022), [The Climate Crisis Disrupts the Education of 40 Million Children Every Year](https://www.educationcannotwait.org/news-stories/press-releases/the-climate-crisis-disrupts-the-education-40-million-children-every) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Park Jisung, R., Goodman, J. et al. (2020) [Heat and Learning, AMERICAN ECONOMIC JOURNAL: ECONOMIC POLICY, vol.12, no. 2, (pp.306-39)](https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20180612) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Save the Children, (2023), [*Global Girlhood Report 2023: Girls at the Centre of the Storm – Her planet, her future, her solutions*](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/global-girlhood-report-2023-girls-at-the-centre-of-the-storm/) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Save the Children, (2023), [Methodological note - Global Girlhood Report 2023](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Methodological-note-Global-Girlhood-Report-2023.pdf/) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. UNICEF, [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action | UNICEF](https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/climate-declaration#declaration)  [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. OHCHR, [General comment No. 26 on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crccgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights), CRC/C/GC/26, 22 Aug, 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. UNICEF, (2023), [General Comment 26 launched in the Pacific.](https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/general-comment-26-launched-pacific) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative, (2023), [*Falling Short: Addressing the climate finance gap for children*](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Climate-Finance-Report-final.pdf/) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Boyd, E., Chaffin, B., et al., (2021) [‘Loss and Damage from Climate Change: A new climate justice agenda’, One Earth, vol. 4, no. 10, 2021, pp. 1365–1370.](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590332221005376) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)