



COP28 POLICY BRIEF: A CALL TO ACTION FOR INTERGENERATIONAL CLIMATE JUSTICE

Introduction

2023 is the hottest year on record. It's a year of unprecedented extreme weather events around the world including heatwaves, droughts, wildfires and floods with devastating impacts for people and the planet.ⁱ Youth and children, in particular girls and young women, in communities most vulnerable to climate shocks in the Global South are most affected.

The stakes are high for today's children and youth at [COP28](#), this year's climate summit. Plan International welcomes the COP28 Presidency's recognition of the urgency of ensuring that the "voices of youth are front and center at COP28" and its efforts to "bring together all stakeholders to highlight a joint commitment to a gender-just transition and the importance of direct access to climate financing for women and girls."ⁱⁱ At COP28's World Climate Action Summitⁱⁱⁱ, the COP28 Youth Climate Champion will set out priorities, including "defining a sustainable, holistic model for meaningful youth engagement for all future COPs, and a call for Parties to support the institutionalisation of the Youth Climate Champion role".^{iv}

This brief meets the moment of COP28 with a call to action for intergenerational climate justice and five tangible solutions to address the climate crisis:

1. Ensure climate policy and action upholds children's rights, recognising the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on children and girls in particular.
2. Support and resource girls' leadership in climate action and policy processes.
3. Increase climate finance that is gender responsive and accessible to girls and young women.
4. Embed children's rights in loss and damage finance governance and decision-making processes.
5. Invest in and implement climate resilient and gender transformative climate education and health systems.

Recommendations

1| Ensure climate policies include actions to uphold children's rights, recognising the disproportionate impact on girls

The climate crisis is the greatest intergenerational injustice children and youth face today, especially in low-income countries where communities are experiencing the most severe negative impacts of the climate crisis daily. A crisis they did not contribute to.^v Already, one

billion children are at extremely elevated risk to impacts of climate change.^{vi} A staggering 88 percent of the global disease burden associated with climate change is borne by children under the age of five.^{vii}

Children's rights are eroded by the climate crisis, notably their right to education, food, health and protection. Children who are economically marginalised and discriminated against including girls, Indigenous children, children with disabilities, refugee, migrant and displaced children disproportionately bear the brunt of the impacts of the climate crisis.

Discriminatory social and gender norms mean that girls and young women are more affected by climate change and yet have the fewest resources to cope and build resilience to these ~~OBJECTIVE~~^{viii} Incorporating gender and age considerations into adaptation and mitigation efforts is essential to ensure existing structural inequalities and barriers to girls' education, health, safety and livelihoods are not further increased by the climate crisis. are not further increased by the climate crisis.

COP28 must commit to upholding children's rights and gender equality across negotiating tracks, taking into account the Children's Environmental Alliance's (CERI) COP28 [recommendations](#) including in the cover decision and the Global Stocktake.

The **cover decision** at COP 28 should:

- a. Encourage all Parties to recognise the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis on children, especially girls, and include measures to address them in updated [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) and [National Adaptation Plans](#). All Parties should sign up to and implement the [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#).
- b. Build on the progress at COP27 and call on the [Subsidiary Body for Implementation](#) (SBI) to convene an expert dialogue on children and climate change to consider how to strengthen climate action and intergenerational equity. The expert dialogue must consider the heightened and specific risks of children facing multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation, including girls in all their diversity. This would be an opportunity to engage in an innovative intergenerational dialogue that can lead to transformative outcomes.

The [Global Stocktake](#) final output should:

- a. Recognise children as a uniquely vulnerable group in need of special protection and investment, with particular attention to children experiencing intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination and inequality, and children facing immediate life-threatening risks as a result of climate change.
- b. Call for the inclusion of child- and gender-responsive measures across all ages in mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, and climate finance.
- c. Call for the collection, use and reporting of age- and gender-disaggregated data with a view to strengthen child- and gender-responsive climate action and policies, including in Nationally Determined Contributions.
- d. Highlight the need for meaningful and safe participation of children in decision-making processes at all levels of government, recognising their status as rights-holders and agents of change. Particular attention to support participation of children facing multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation, including girls, is critical.
- e. Affirm that approaches to climate action must be aligned with countries' human rights obligations, including the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the [Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment](#), and the [principle of intergenerational equity](#).

2| Support and resource girls' leadership in climate action and policy processes

Those on the frontlines of climate crisis should not be side-lined when it comes to decision-making. Yet, young women and girls are woefully under-represented in climate negotiations and decision making as active stakeholders. The rights of children and youth, including girls in all their diversity, must be at the heart of all levels of climate action decision-making. They bring knowledge, solutions and leadership to addressing the climate crisis.

According to a 2021 Plan International survey 91 percent of adolescents and youth said that it was difficult for them to participate in climate change policy decision-making processes.^{ix} Only five percent knew how to engage in the negotiations related to the implementation of the [Paris Agreement](#). Despite this, girls and young women—as activists and members of organisations and networks led by young people—are actively campaigning on climate issues.^x

Governments at all levels must support the leadership and voice of girls and young women in the response to the climate crisis through increased participation in policy design, implementation, and measurement, and establishing opportunities for meaningful engagement in climate change processes and negotiations.

COP28 must encourage all Parties to:

- a. Enable girls' participation in all climate and UNFCCC processes at local, national, regional and international levels and support in making climate processes inclusive for all.
- b. Allocate additional budget and strengthen capacity of governments at all levels to ensure effective engagement of girls and young women in climate-related decision making.
- c. Increase public education and awareness on gender and social equality, climate change and disasters, to create a welcoming, open civic space for girls and young women to lead climate movements.
- d. Create and maintain formal mechanisms to encourage children and young people, including girls and young women, to participate in policymaking and implementation including through youth climate councils.
- e. Explicitly recognise and facilitate girls' right to participation in all forms of climate action, in a meaningful and safe way, by:
 - i. Addressing gender- and age-specific barriers to participation in climate action and policy processes, creating enabling environments that facilitate the meaningful participation of girls throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
 - ii. Ensuring adolescent girls and young women have opportunities to meaningfully engage in the development, review, implementation and monitoring of climate policies and programmes.
 - iii. Ensuring information on disaster risks, climate impacts, risk reduction measures and relevant policy frameworks is easily accessible, and age- and gender-responsive and acknowledges governments' role in providing this information.

3| Increase climate finance that is gender-responsive and accessible to girls and young women

Climate finance is key to implementing climate action required to meet the target of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C and to safeguard communities from the intergenerational impacts of the climate crisis.^{xi} Yet global climate finance commitments are unfulfilled, inadequate and not

responsive to children's unique needs and perspectives, particularly for addressing the adaptation gap^{xii}, and loss and damage.^{xiii}

Young women and girls are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. At the same time, women and girls on the frontlines of the climate crisis are leaders in developing effective responses and strategies to build resilience. They need to be supported, including with increased resources. Yet, global investment in climate action that integrates gender equality as a principal purpose is extremely low – at approximately 2.4 percent of all climate-related Official Development Assistance.^{xiv}

COP28 must commit to:

- a. Urgently close the adaptation financing gap and provide funding for loss and damage through the provision of new and additional climate finance to existing Official Development Assistance flows. Children and essential social services for children must be placed at the forefront of such efforts, with a particular focus on reaching girls and other children most at risk. Climate finance should be delivered primarily in the form of grants, particularly for adaptation and loss and damage in developing countries and fragile contexts.
- b. Prioritise investments to strengthen the climate resilience of social services through child-responsive interventions, including in education, health, food and nutrition, clean energy, water, sanitation and hygiene, child and social protection services, and disaster risk reduction.
- c. Integrate the meaningful engagement and participation of children, including girls in all their diversity, in climate finance decision-making processes at all levels, and at all stages of the project cycle.
- d. Ensure that the Global Goal on Adaptation framework enables better access, quantity and quality of adaptation finance, including traceability to the local level, gender and child responsiveness.
- e. Call for a comprehensive review of the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) to ensure a stronger consideration of human rights, and specifically, children's rights, in the mandate of the Committee. The SCF plays a crucial role in the coherence and coordination of climate finance and should prioritise and protect the rights of children in climate action.
- f. Call for an ambitious and child- and gender-responsive New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) incorporating specific funding windows dedicated to delivering child- and gender-responsive outcomes at the scale required. The ad hoc work programme on the NCQG provides multiple opportunities for intervention including through submissions and participation in Technical Expert Dialogues. The design and distribution of the collective quantified goal on climate finance must consider children's rights and the needs and priorities of developing countries and Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (FCAS).
 - i. Implement enhanced people-centred, rights-based and child- and gender-responsive approaches to climate finance.
 - ii. Scale up funding for locally led adaptation that strengthens the decision-making power of, and direct implementation by, affected girls and young women and their communities. Countries should commit to and implement the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation.
 - iii. Scale up funding for conflict-sensitive, multi-annual and flexible Anticipatory Action (AA) programming that is designed to strengthen existing systems to prevent climate-induced shocks from escalating into severe crises. Programming must be participatory and co-created with local communities, inclusive of diverse

- needs and able to reach the most marginalised, including those facing intersecting discriminations.
- iv. Funding must be accessible and responsive to the rights and needs of girls, women, children, youth, Indigenous Peoples and other marginalised groups, including those living with a disability.
 - v. Support countries experiencing hunger in accessing climate finance to adapt to and strengthen resilience to ongoing and future climate shocks and stresses.

4| Embed child rights in loss and damage finance governance and decision-making processes

The decision to establish funding arrangements to address loss and damage, including a [Loss and Damage Fund](#) at COP27 was a critical step in addressing loss and damage and a long-awaited breakthrough in climate negotiations. The Loss and Damage Fund and loss and damage finance arrangements present an opportunity to learn from past experiences of financing climate action and to integrate children, including girls, as key actors.

The impacts of loss and damage are experienced in youth and children's everyday lives as growing inequality, hunger, lack of access to education and health services, threats to livelihoods, risks of gender-based violence, child, early and forced marriage, and loss of loved ones.

Children and youth around the world are facing an increase in extreme weather events. Climate-induced loss and damage will become even more severe and frequent in the coming years. Even if current climate policy commitments are met, a child born in 2020 will experience a two- to seven-fold increase in extreme weather events,^{xv} particularly heat waves, compared with people born in 1960. The climate crisis will also significantly increase in the number of disasters yearly— from 400 in 2015 to 560 by 2030.^{xvi} While the human costs of loss and damage for today's youth and children and future generations are incalculable, the estimated economic cost is staggering. By 2030, the financial cost of loss and damage for developing countries is estimated at between \$290-580 billion (USD) annually.^{xvii} By 2050, the cost is estimated to reach \$1 to \$1.8 trillion (USD) yearly.^{xviii}

COP28 must:

- a. Support the [Loss and Damage Youth Coalition's COP28 Demands](#) and the [Children's Environmental Rights Initiative submission to Transitional Committee](#) on Loss and Damage. The newly mandated Loss and Damage Fund as well as loss and damage financing more broadly must place children at their core by:
 - i. Incorporating child rights, gender equality, and leaving no one behind as guiding principles.
 - ii. Meaningfully engaging children and young people in all their diversity in the process—including design, monitoring and implementation.
 - iii. Taking account of diverse children's particular needs and unique vulnerabilities, including girls and groups of children facing intersecting forms of marginalisation.
 - iv. Ensuring access to funding for children, their families, and organisations led by girls and young people leading the response to the climate crisis.
 - v. Ensuring accountability and access to justice for children and young people in all their diversity.

- vi. Investing in children by rebuilding and recovering children's critical services such as education, health, nutrition, child protection, social protection and WASH.
- b. Call for explicit reference to children and their rights in the governing instrument, accountability mechanisms and guidelines of the new Loss and Damage Fund.
- c. Ensure that the Loss and Damage Fund is child- and gender- responsive, addressing children's rights and intergenerational inequity by prioritising children already experiencing the worst effects of loss and damage in their communities.
- d. Call for a dedicated funding window for local communities. The community window should provide grants and other forms of finance directly for children, their families, and organisations, thus making access to climate finance more inclusive, equitable and effective in addressing children's context-specific priorities.

5] Invest in and implement climate resilient and gender-transformative climate education and health systems

Education systems must be designed to support climate action to increase the opportunity for children and young people to learn about the ongoing global climate crisis impacting their lives and futures. Education can increase understanding and skills in risk identification, reduction and mitigation, early warning systems and early action, contingency planning, lifesaving information and skills, and response and adaptation actions to extreme weather events. Girls' education is strongly linked with impactful climate action. Countries that have focused on girls' education have suffered far fewer losses from droughts and floods than countries with lower levels of girls' education.^{xix}

Disasters caused by extreme weather events pose a significant challenge to the basic determinants of physical and mental health, including clean air, safe drinking water, nutrition, shelter and safety.^{xx} For the first time, there will be a thematic day on 'Health' at COP28, which marks an essential step in recognising the impacts of the climate crisis on health. Climate shocks and stresses routinely place girls, especially during adolescence, at increased risk of gender-based violence, including sexual assault, resulting in trauma and unplanned pregnancies, human trafficking and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage. They also cause disruption in access to sexual and reproductive health, family-planning services and maternal and postnatal care.^{xxi} This can direct adolescent girls into a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty, vulnerability, and further marginalisation. The economic costs to health due to the climate is estimated to reach between USD 2-4 billion per year by 2030.^{xxii}

COP28 must commit to encourage all Parties to:

- i. Recognise the importance of and integrate strategies to build climate resilience across education and health systems aligned with climate and disaster risk reduction policies, plans and actions at all levels, including in National Adaptation Plans.
- ii. Increase the availability of socio-demographic data disaggregated by sex, age and disability to inform inclusive, protective and gender-responsive approaches in education and health systems, address and reduce age and gender-specific barriers to the participation of girls in all their diversity in the design, implementation and monitoring of anticipatory action programmes in education and health.

- iii. Strengthen and fund education and health systems to be more resilient, in the face of climate shocks that affect education and sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescent girls and young women.
- iv. As part of adaptation strategies in Nationally Determined Contributions, strengthen health systems to prevent climate related deaths from avoidable causes such as malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress, including for the most vulnerable children, adolescent girls and young women in climate affected contexts.

Conclusion

The duty to act at COP28 could not be more urgent. The rights and wellbeing of children and youth today, future generations and the planet are at stake. Passing on the escalating impacts of human induced climate change to future generations is a moral and leadership failure.

Children and young people are calling for political leadership, action, and co-operation at all levels to stand with the over three billion people who live in countries highly vulnerable to climate change. Everyone has a role to play. Plan International calls on decision makers at COP28 to take meaningful action to address the climate crisis. The fate of today's children and youth, including the most vulnerable girls and young women, is in jeopardy. Their participation is essential. Their voices and solutions must be heard and acted upon.

Annex: Plan International climate research and reports

[Adolescent girls in crisis: Experiences of migration in Central America and Mexico](#), 2023

[Adolescent Girls in the Climate Crisis: Voices from Zambia](#), September 2021

[Climate Justice: Loss and Damage Finance for Children. Transmission to Transitional Committee](#), August 2023

[Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation](#), Accessed October 2023

[From the frontlines: Youth call for action to address loss and damage caused by climate change](#), October 2022

[Girls' activism and leadership for climate justice in Asia and the Pacific](#), May 2023

Real Lives, Real Choices Climate Change and Girls Education: Barriers, Gender Norms and Pathways to Resilience (Forthcoming, November 2023)

[Reimagining Climate Education and Youth Leadership](#), 2021

[Safe Schools Global Programme - Our goals](#) Bangladesh, 2022

[Supporting women to take the lead in renewable energy](#), July 2023

[Young People and Green Skills: Preparing for a sustainable future](#) Kenya, 2022

[Youth Leadership in Climate Policy Workbook](#)

[Working with young people to adapt cities for climate resilience](#), October 20

End Notes

ⁱ According to analysis of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) seven of the 10 countries most vulnerable to climate disasters are in Africa. See: [10 countries at risk of climate disaster](#), April 6, 2023. In 2023, all of Africa was affected by extreme weather disasters, ranging from catastrophic flooding in Libya to intense heat in Malawi. Across Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, Mauritania and Niger more than 29 million people continue to face unrelenting drought conditions See: Carbon Brief, [Analysis: Africa's extreme weather has killed at least 15,000 people in 2023](#), October 25, 2023. July 2023 shattered global average temperatures and heat extremes—which are among the deadliest weather-related hazards. People in areas experiencing intense influence of anthropogenic climate change on temperatures live near the equator and small island developing states. See: Climate Central, [Worldwide daily fingerprints of climate change during Earth's hottest month](#), August 1, 2023. Climate change made both the devastating drought in the Horn of Africa and the record April 2023 temperatures in the Western Mediterranean at least 100 times more likely. See: World Meteorological Organization, [September smashes monthly temperature record by record margin](#), October 17, 2023. World Weather Attribution, [Extreme April heat in Spain, Portugal, Morocco & Algeria almost impossible without climate change](#), May 5, 2023. World Weather Attribution, [Human-induced climate change increased drought severity in Horn of Africa](#), April 27, 2023.

ⁱⁱ Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, COP28 President-Designate UAE Special Envoy for Climate Change, [Message from the President-Designate of COP28/CMP18/CMA5, and UAE Special Envoy for Climate Change - COP 28 Vision](#), July 13, 2023. The COP28 Presidency has emphasised that "a just energy transition will be an important signal coming out of COP28 to tackle necessary emissions reductions, course correct and cut emissions in line with Paris compatible pathways by 2030. At the same time, we must consider how to build the energy system of tomorrow and work towards a future energy system that is free of unabated fossil fuels by mid-century including by scaling the deployment of all available solutions and technologies."

ⁱⁱⁱ World Action Climate Summit is part of COP28's thematic program December 1-2, 2023. See: <https://www.cop28.com/thematic-program>

^{iv} In October 2023, the COP28 Presidency reiterated the importance of youth participation at COPs. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, [Letter from the President-Designate of COP28/CMP18/CMA5, and UAE Special Envoy for Climate Change](#), October 17, 2023.

^v Rich countries have contributed an estimated 92 percent of historical emissions, are responsible for 37 percent of current emissions, and account for 15 percent of the global population. Historic emissions are from J. Hickel. See [Quantifying national responsibility for climate breakdown: an equality-based attribution approach for carbon dioxide emissions in excess of the planetary boundary](#), The Lancet, Planetary Health, Vol. 4, Issue 9, e399–404, September 2020. 3.3 to 3.6 billion people are living in climate vulnerability driven by ongoing inequity patterns of marginalization, colonialism, and unstable socio-economic development. The IPCC acknowledges that today's "development challenges causing high vulnerability are influenced by historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, especially for many Indigenous Peoples and local communities." See: IPCC, Sixth Assessment Report Impacts, [Adaptation and Vulnerability, Summary for Policymakers Headline Statements](#), February 2022.

^{vi} UNICEF, [The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis](#), August 2021.

^{vii} UNICEF, [The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis](#), August 2021.

^{viii} Plan International, [Effects of climate change on girls' rights](#), accessed October 27, 2023.

^{ix} Climate change and environmental degradation came out as a priority issue for young feminist activists with over 40 percent stating they are actively advocating on this issue. See: Plan International, [Reimagining climate education and youth leadership](#), July 2021.

^x Plan International, [From the Frontlines: Youth call for action to address loss and damage caused by climate change](#), 2022

^{xi} Children's Environmental Rights Alliance, [Falling short: addressing the climate finance gap for children](#), June 15, 2023.

^{xii} According to a recent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, the adaptation finance gap is widening. Funding to developing nations declined 15 percent in 2021 and doubling adaptation finance would only reduce the gap by five to 10 percent. See: UNEP, [Adaptation Gap Report 2023](#), November 2, 2023.

^{xiii} Child-focused climate finance should be considered a human rights obligation. However, children and youth are rarely considered as key beneficiaries or stakeholders in Multilateral Climate Funds (MCF) projects. In a recent study by the Children's Environmental Rights Initiative only 13 percent of MCF projects were found to consider children and youth explicitly and meaningfully. See: Children's Environmental Rights Alliance, [Falling short: addressing the climate finance gap for children](#), June 15, 2023. Despite needs estimated at \$4 trillion by 2030 to keep to a 1.5°C trajectory of global warming, the \$100 billion target for climate finance which should have been reached by 2020, has been

missed every year to date (based on available data up to 2021). See: ODI, Pettinotti et al., [A fair share of climate finance? The adaptation edition](#), 2023.

^{xiv} OECD, [Development Finance for Gender Responsive Climate Action](#), March 2022.

^{xv} Wim Thiery et.al., [Intergenerational inequities in exposure to climate extremes](#), September, 2021. The study finds a "disproportionate climate change burden for young generations in the Global South." See also Save the Children, [Born into the climate crisis](#), 2021.

^{xvi} United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, [Global Assessment on Disaster Risk Reduction: Our World at Risk Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future](#), 2022.

^{xvii} IPCC, Sixth Assessment Report, [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#), February 2022.

^{xviii} Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, [Unpacking finance for Loss and Damage](#), November 2021.

^{xix} For every additional year of schooling a girl receives on average, her country's resilience to climate disasters can be expected to improve by 3.2 points on the ND-GAIN Index. Brookings Institute [Why is girls' education important for climate action?](#) February 10, 2021.

^{xx} WHO, [Climate change and health](#), October 2021.

^{xxi} UNFPA, [The impact of the climate crisis on sexual and reproductive health and rights](#), May 12, 2022. Women and Gender Constituency and the SRHR & Climate Justice Coalition, [Climate Justice and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#), 2021 Linda C. Giudice, Erlidia F. Llamas-Clark, Nathaniel DeNicola, Santosh Pandipati, and Marya G. Zlatnik, [Climate change, women's health, and the role of obstetricians and gynecologists in leadership](#), Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics, October 25, 2021.

^{xxii} WHO, [Climate Change and Health](#), October 2021.