

Policy brief

COP 30



Introduction

Children and youth today are leading the charge for climate justice - standing up for their own futures and those of generations to come.

The International Court of Justice in its July 2025 Advisory Opinion confirmed that governments have both a legal and moral duty to protect the rights of present and future generations from climate harm.ⁱ This milestone for intergenerational justice was propelled by Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change, whose youth-led campaign reshaped global expectations of accountability.ⁱⁱ

COP30 in Belém is the Implementation COP - a test of whether leaders can turn commitments into tangible results. Guided by Brazil's *Global Mutirão for Climate Justice*, the Presidency has called for inclusive, collective implementation that connects climate ambition to people's lives. Yet 2025 is projected to be among the hottest years on record: rising temperatures are already disrupting education, health and livelihoods for millions of children who bear the least responsibility for the crisis.ⁱⁱⁱ

“As young people living on the frontlines of the climate crisis, we carry the weight of disrupted futures - but also the determination to shape solutions that are just, inclusive and lasting.”
- Faith, 21, Sierra Leone, She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration ^{iv}

At stake in Belém is trust and political will: whether Parties can deliver on finance, adaptation and justice in ways that protect, empower and prepare today's and future generations.

Scale Up Rights-Based Climate Finance That Reaches Girls, Youth and Communities Most at Risk

Bridging the Trust Gap

Finance is the backbone of the Paris Agreement - and the decisive test of COP30's credibility. Without scaled-up, predictable and equitable funding, adaptation and loss-and-damage efforts will fail, leaving millions of children and youth - especially girls - at risk.

At COP29 (Baku), Parties acknowledged the need to mobilise at least USD 1.3 trillion annually by 2035 for climate action in developing countries, with developed country Parties taking the lead in providing at least USD 300 billion per year.^v

The Baku to Belém Roadmap - a Presidency-led process - is expected to outline evidence-based pathways for achieving these targets.^{vi} To ensure impact and accountability, it should advance locally led approaches that channel finance to those most affected by the climate crisis, including girls and young women.

Parties at COP30 could recognise the Roadmap in a cover decision while committing to significantly expanding public and grant-based finance as the foundation for meeting global climate finance targets and delivering for developing countries.

Scaling Public and Grant-Based Finance

Public adaptation flows reached USD 28 billion in 2022, far below the USD 194-366 billion needed annually.^{vii} Only 2.4 percent of multilateral climate finance targets child-responsive activities,^{viii} and gender-responsive projects remain a small share of total flows^{ix}.

Many LDCs and SIDS spend more servicing debt than on climate investment.^x Private capital can complement, not replace, public finance. With the right enabling conditions, private finance could expand from its current three percent of adaptation flows to around 15 percent, with a concentration in certain sectors like agriculture and lower proportions in LDCs and SIDS.^{xi} This scale-up of private finance will not happen by market forces alone, and care must be taken to ensure that private solutions support locally-led adaptation.

“Climate finance often stops at high levels and never reaches the girls, women and young people who need it most. Rights-based, accessible finance is not an option - it is justice.”
- Hamdiatu, 24, Ghana, She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration ^{xii}

Ensuring Access and Accountability

Finance must be grant-based, locally led, and inclusive. COP30 should establish transparent systems for tracking finance quantity, quality, and accessibility, disaggregated by gender and age. The Roadmap should explicitly recognize children - especially girls - as rights-holders, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Comment No. 26)^{xiii} and the recent Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which reaffirmed the obligations States have to protect children's and future generations from the impacts of climate change.

COP30 Recommendations

- Integrate gender- and child-responsive criteria into climate finance allocations.
- Recognise the Baku to Belém Roadmap in a cover decision and set milestones toward USD 1.3 trillion by 2035, supported by an accountability mechanism.
- Establish a new adaptation finance commitment that meets the needs and is tracked on a grant-equivalent basis.
- Ensure adaptation finance is primarily grant-based or highly concessional funding.
- Ensure direct access for LDCs, SIDS and youth-, girl- and Indigenous-led organisations.
- Advance polluter-pays mechanisms and fossil-fuel-subsidy reform to expand public finance.

Champion Girls and Youth Leadership and Embed Intergenerational Equity Across COP30 Outcomes

Closing the Participation Gap

Less than half of all Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in the last cycle (2.0) incorporated any child- or youth-sensitive elements, and only a small fraction included costed or measurable child-responsive measures.^{xiv} With 62 Parties having submitted new or updated NDC 3.0s as of October 2025,^{xv} COP30 must close this gap by committing to mainstream gender- and age-responsive measures across NDCs.

Financing Youth and Girl-Led Action

Youth- and girl-led organizations receive less than 1 percent of international climate finance^{xvi}, and only about 3.4 percent of adaptation funding targets gender equality as a principal objective^{xvii}. COP30 should mandate dedicated funding windows, participatory grants and age-disaggregated tracking to enable direct access and accountability.

“Finance without accessibility is an empty promise. We need direct, transparent funding that empowers our communities to act now, not just survive.”

- Faith, 21, Sierra Leone, She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration ^{xviii}

From Consultation to Shared Power

The Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) framework anchors inclusive governance through education, training, awareness and participation.^{xxix} At SB62 (2025), Parties agreed to strengthen policy coherence between ACE, the GGA and Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP). COP30 should adopt a decision linking ACE implementation to financing and accountability.

COP30 Recommendations

- Embed structured representation of girls, youth and children across UNFCCC bodies and climate funds.
- Create dedicated funding windows for youth-, girl- and Indigenous-led organisations.
- Integrate education and green-skills training within national climate strategies.
- Support youth-led accountability mechanisms to monitor NDC and finance delivery.
- Deliver a follow-up mandate to the Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate Change.
- Encourage Parties to join the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action.^{xx}

Adopt and Resource a Strengthened Gender Action Plan (GAP)

Gender Equality Matters

The climate crisis intensifies existing inequalities. Girls and young women face heightened risks of violence, early marriage and school drop-out during climate-related crises.^{xxi} Yet gender equality remains marginal in global climate policy^{xxii}; UNFCCC finance assessments show that gender-responsive projects account for only a small share of total flows.^{xxiii}

From Principles to Practice

The Gender Action Plan, renewed every five years, is the UNFCCC's mechanism for advancing gender-responsive climate action.^{xxiv} COP30 is the moment to move from commitment to implementation: adopt a measurable, time-bound and resourced GAP aligned with the UAE–Belém Work Programme on Gender and Climate Change, ensuring coherence with adaptation, finance and loss-and-damage processes.^{xxv}

“Promoting gender parity is not just about fairness — it’s about harnessing the full range of knowledge and innovation needed to build resilient, just communities.”
- Margret, 25, Uganda, She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration ^{xxvi}

COP30 Recommendations

- Adopt a measurable, resourced, time-bound GAP with financing and accountability mechanisms.
- Integrate gender-, child- and age-responsive approaches across adaptation and finance frameworks.
- Ensure funded participation of girls and young women in planning and evaluation.

- Embed education, protection and health in gender-responsive climate strategies (NAPs & NDCs).
- Invest in gender- and age-disaggregated data and expertise to track results.

Advance Social Resilience and a Just Transition for Future Generations

Defining Social Resilience Under the GGA

More than 3.6 billion people live in areas highly vulnerable to climate impacts^{xxvii}. The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) offers the chance to define and measure resilience that protects people as well as infrastructure.^{xxviii} Indicators should include education, health, WASH, food security, protection, anticipatory action and nature-based solutions, and be disaggregated by sex, age and other factors, consistent with the UNFCCC Expert Group Technical Report.^{xxix}

“Girls and women want to be trained in green skills and work in renewable energy and sustainable agriculture. Empowering us is hitting two birds with one stone — tackling climate change and gender inequality.”- Ilham, 20, Ethiopia, *She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration* ^{xxx}

Linking Adaptation and Employment

The Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) should connect adaptation and livelihoods.^{xxxi} The ILO finds that well-designed climate policies can generate millions of green jobs by 2030 if education and skills systems are strengthened.^{xxxii} COP30 should align the GGA and JTWP so that adaptation investments generate employment and resilience together.

COP30 Recommendations

- Adopt a GGA framework embedding social resilience outcomes (gender equality, education, health, WASH, food security, protection).
- Ensure indicators are gender-, child- and youth-responsive, with mandatory disaggregation.
- Link Means of Implementation to grant-based, locally accessible finance.
- Integrate anticipatory action and early-warning systems into the GGA framework.
- Anchor the JTWP in human rights, gender equality and intergenerational equity, creating green-skills pathways for youth and girls.

Conclusion | Turning Commitments into Results

The outcomes of COP30 will be judged by whether governments fulfil their obligations to protect children and future generations from climate harm. By embedding child rights, gender equality and youth leadership across finance, adaptation and governance, Parties can turn the Amazon COP into a turning point for people, rights and the planet.

“We are not waiting to be included - we are already leading. COP30 must prove that the world is finally ready to follow our lead.”- Damaris, 23, Kenya, *She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration* ^{xxxiii}

Endnotes

- ⁱ International Court of Justice [Advisory Opinion on States' Obligations in Respect of Climate Change](#) (July 2025)
- ⁱⁱ Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change, [The World's Youth Hail Historic Climate Ruling by World Court](#),
- ⁱⁱⁱ World Meteorological Organization (WMO), [WMO Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update \(2025-2029\)](#), (May 2025)
- ^{iv} Quotes in this brief are from She Leads, [She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration](#), (2025)
- ^v UNFCCC, (2024), [NCQG Process and COP29 Decision Summary](#), (2024); and Climate Home News, [At pre-COP in Brazil, climate finance roadmap to \\$1.3 trillion remains hazy](#), (2025)
- ^{vi} Mercy Corps, Plan International, Concern World Wide, Practical Action, [Baku to Belém Roadmap Submission](#), (September 2025)
- ^{vii} UNEP, [Adaptation Gap Report 2024](#), (2024)
- ^{viii} CERI, [Falling short: Addressing the Finance Gap for Children](#), (2023)
- ^{ix} OECD, Gender Equality Perspectives Series, [Development Finance for Gender-Responsive Climate Action](#), (2022)
- ^x IIED, [World's least developed countries spend twice as much servicing debts as they receive in climate finance](#), (2024.) On this trend, see also Eurodad, [Small Island Developing States Have Spent 18 times more in debt repayments than they receive in climate finance](#), (2022)
- ^{xi} Climate Resilience Alliance, [Adaptation Finance and the Private Sector: Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Countries](#), (2025)
- ^{xii} Quotes in this brief are from She Leads, [She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration](#), (2025)
- ^{xiii} UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General comment No. 26 \(2023\) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change](#), (2023)
- ^{xiv} UNICEF, [Child-sensitive climate policies for every child](#), (2024)
- ^{xv} UNFCCC, [NDC 3.0](#) (accessed October 10, 2025). [With NDC Updates Delayed, COP30 Faces Urgent Climate Challenges](#), and [NDC Registry](#) (2025)
- ^{xvi} UN Women, [Generation Equality Accountability Report](#), (2023)
- ^{xvii} UN Women, [Core Steps to Increase Quality and Quantity of Gender-Responsive Climate Finance](#) (2021)
- ^{xviii} Quotes in this brief are from She Leads, [She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration](#), (2025)
- ^{xix} UNFCCC, [Action for Climate Empowerment](#).
- ^{xx} UNICEF, [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#).
- ^{xxi} Plan International, [Report: Let me be a Child, not a Wife: Girls' Experiences of Living through Child Marriage](#), (2025) and [What do Girls and Boys from Latin America and the Caribbean have to say to the G20 Leaders](#), (2024)
- ^{xxii} AfriCatalyst, [The climate crisis isn't gender-neutral. So why is climate finance?](#), (2025)
- ^{xxiii} UNFCCC, [Standing Committee on Finance Sixth BA- Technical report](#), (2024)
- ^{xxiv} UNFCCC, [A New Decade for Advancing Gender-Responsive Climate Policies That Benefit All](#), (2025); and What Works to Prevent Violence, [A Missing Link: the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan and Gender Based Violence](#), (2024)
- ^{xxv} Mercy Corps Netherlands, [Priorities for Climate Justice at COP30](#), (2025)
- ^{xxvi} Quotes in this brief are from She Leads, [She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration](#), (2025)
- ^{xxvii} Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), [Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report](#), (2023)
- ^{xxviii} UNFCCC, [Adaptation Committee: Approaches to Reviewing the Overall Progress Made in Achieving the Global Goal on Adaptation, Technical Paper](#), (2021)
- ^{xxix} UNFCCC, [Technical Report on Indicators for Measuring Progress Achieved Towards the Targets](#), (2025)
- ^{xxx} Quotes in this brief are from She Leads, [She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration](#), (2025)
- ^{xxxi} Stanley Center for Peace and Security, [Making Just Transition Happen: The Role of the Just Transition Work Programme in 2025](#), (2025)
- ^{xxxii} International Labour Organization, [Skills for a Greener Future: A Global View](#), (2025)
- ^{xxxiii} Quotes in this brief are from She Leads, [She Leads COP30 Youth Declaration](#), (2025)

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity.

We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries. We won't stop until we are all equal.

Annex | Plan International Research: Youth and Climate Action

Across five years of participatory research and youth consultations in more than 40 countries, Plan International's evidence reveals a consistent message: girls and young people are already leading climate action - but they are doing so in systems that still fail to resource, recognise, or protect them. Three themes emerge across the global evidence base:

- Climate impacts are deepening existing gender and social inequalities. From the Sahel to Southeast Asia, girls face increased risks of early marriage, gender-based violence, and loss of education as families cope with droughts and displacement.
- Youth-led innovation is driving local resilience. Young people are pioneering education, green-skills training, and nature-based adaptation initiatives but face barriers to finance and policy influence.
- Equitable, rights-based climate action delivers broader development gains. When climate strategies integrate gender equality, education, and child protection, they strengthen social cohesion and accelerate adaptation.

Together, this research confirms that investing in girls' education, leadership, and access to finance is one of the most effective and overlooked strategies for climate resilience and justice.

Title	Key Focus
<u><i>A Gathering Storm: The Gendered Impact of Climate Change on the Rights of Adolescent Girls and Young Women in the Sahel</i></u> 2025	Examines how drought and insecurity deepen gender inequality and threaten girls' rights. Youth call for investment in climate-resilient livelihoods, girls' education, and protection systems that prevent early marriage and exploitation
<u><i>Beyond inclusion: Empowering women and girls for smarter, fairer Nature-based Solutions for climate change</i></u> 2025	This document provides a clear justification and evidence base for gender-transformative NbS, drawing from extensive research on women's roles in conservation and climate resilience, and highlights the need for greater research focused on girls and youth in NbS work. It outlines why gender must be central to NbS design, implementation, and governance, demonstrating that interventions that fail to account for gender are less effective, less sustainable, and less equitable.
<u><i>Seeds of Change: Girls' rights in the era of ecological crisis</i></u> 2025	The Seeds of Change: Girls' rights in the era of ecological crisis report sheds light on the impacts of interrelated environmental degradation and gender inequality, examining

	how ecological breakdown undermines girls' rights in low and middle-income countries.
<u><i>Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate</i></u> 2024	Highlights the resilience and leadership of Pacific girls facing intensifying storms and sea-level rise. Youth calling for recognition of Indigenous knowledge, gender-responsive climate education, and participation in national adaptation planning
<u><i>For Our Futures: Youth Voices on Climate Justice and Education</i></u> 2023	Captures perspectives from over 1,000 young people in 37 countries on the link between education and climate justice Youth calling for climate education that empowers civic engagement, links to green jobs, and holds governments accountable for emissions and inaction.
<u><i>Real Choices, Real Lives: Climate Change and Girls' Education Barriers, Gender Norms and Pathways to Resilience</i></u> 2023	Shows how climate change reinforces harmful gender norms and limits girls' access to education. Youth call for climate adaptation policies that keep girls in school and challenge discriminatory norms.
<u><i>From the Frontlines: Youth Call for Action to Address Loss and Damage Caused by Climate Change</i></u> 2022	Documents youth-led advocacy in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific on loss and damage. Youth call for accessible, grant-based loss and damage finance that reaches affected communities and prioritizes health, education and protection.
<u><i>Young People and Green Skills: Preparing for a Sustainable Future</i></u> 2022	Explores youth readiness for green jobs and just transition pathways. Youth call for investment in technical training, entrepreneurship, and education-to-employment pipelines for climate-resilient livelihoods.
<u><i>Reimagining Climate Education and Youth Leadership</i></u> 2021	Highlights how education systems can better prepare young people for climate challenges. Youth call for curriculum reform, hands-on learning, and meaningful participation in school and community climate decisions.

<u><i>Climate Change, Young Women and Girls: Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation in Northern Thailand</i></u> 2020	Investigates the experiences of girls and women in rural Thailand adapting to environmental change. Youth call for community-based adaptation strategies, gender equality in decision-making, and livelihood support for women farmers.
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