

**High Commissioner's Dialogue  
on Protection Challenges:  
Protection and Resilience during Pandemics**

UNICEF written statement

**Climate Action**



**Climate change is a direct threat to children's ability to survive, grow, and thrive**

As extreme weather events such as cyclones and heatwaves increase in frequency and ferocity, they threaten children's lives and destroy infrastructure critical to their well-being. Floods compromise water and sanitation facilities, leading to diseases such as cholera, to which children are particularly vulnerable. Droughts and changing global rainfall patterns are leading to crop failures and rising food prices, causing food insecurity and nutritional deprivations that can have lifelong impacts. Today, around 500 million children live in areas with high risk of flooding, and nearly 160 million children live in areas of extreme or high risk of drought – these children are more vulnerable to climate shocks and displacement.

Children are the most vulnerable to diseases that will become more widespread as a result of climate change, such as malaria and dengue fever. Close to 90 per cent of the burden of disease attributable to climate change is borne by children under the age of 5.

The evidence for the impact of air pollution on children is firm and growing. Approximately two billion children live in areas where air pollution levels exceed standards set by the World Health Organization, causing them to breathe toxic air and putting their health and brain development at risk. Every year, over half a million children under the age of 5 die from air-pollution-related causes. Even more will suffer lasting damage to their developing brains and lungs.

Climate change, environmental degradation and natural disaster are driving millions of people out of their homes, causing displacement and triggering conflict.

Refugee children and other children on the move are disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change. Displaced families have a harder time coping with shocks. The most vulnerable are already losing their homes, health and education. And as climate change makes crises more common, it becomes harder to recover from them.

### **Immediate climate action is necessary to avoid suffering of future generations**

Addressing climate change and mitigating its impact is imperative for UNICEF to fulfill its mandate, to protect the world's children and to fulfill their rights. UNICEF is working with governments and partners globally to help translate into action the commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the Global Compact on Refugees. UNICEF works to ensure that children are an essential part of climate change strategies and disaster response plans.

Children are agents of change and UNICEF encourages young people all over the world to set an example for their communities, to elevate their voices on climate change and promote environmentally sustainable lifestyles. UNICEF's efforts to empower youth are inclusive and focus on the most vulnerable young people, including those uprooted by climate change.

To protect children from the impact of climate change and environmental degradation, UNICEF supports initiatives to make schools, health centres, water and sanitation and other facilities resistant to climate and environmental shocks. Such initiatives include climate-smart water, sanitation and hygiene services; sustainable energy and disaster risk response in schools; and sustainable energy and disaster risk response in health centres. At last year's Global Refugee Forum, UNICEF joined the Clean Energy Challenge to provide cleaner and safer energy to displaced populations.

Reducing emissions and pollution is essential to tackle the climate crisis and reduce the impact of climate change on children. UNICEF works to improve air pollution monitoring and advocacy and supports governments to respond to the increased incidence of pneumonia and other respiratory diseases that arise because of air pollution.