

# BORN INTO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

WHY  
WE MUST ACT **NOW**  
TO SECURE  
CHILDREN'S  
RIGHTS

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY AND  
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Save the Children



## Child participation statement

This report has been developed with the support of a dedicated Child Reference Group, comprised of 12 children aged between 12–17 years old from Albania, Bangladesh, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Kosovo, Norway, Somalia, Sri Lanka, the United States, and Zambia, to lay out how the intergenerational impacts of climate change are infringing on children's rights to life, education, and protection. We thank these children – and all child advocates for climate action globally – for their time, their thoughtful recommendations, and their continued commitment to defending the rights of children in the face of a climate crisis not of their own making.





## Poem on Climate Change

**Justina**

15 year-old-girl, Zambia

*My soul is so grieved*

*My heart is so hurt,*

*Because of the change, obstruction, destruction known as “Climate change”.*

*Oh! Climate Change how sweet and lovely is the melody and sound it has,  
yet the negative impact it has brought on the environment.*

*I [as] a child of this generation,  
I want to voice out on the impact climate change has brought.*

*This has given children less participation in this nation,*

*Excessive rains causing floods, which bring about diseases such as cholera,  
by the affected water which is untreated.*

*Poor rains causing drought, leading to food shortage which is causing hunger on children  
as a result leads to less concentration on lessons on their education.*

*Excess rains leading to poor attendance on school going children.*

*Poor rains leading to load shedding giving people no option but to  
practice deforestation for charcoal use all in the name supplementing electricity.*

*Huh! My words are failing to come out*

*My tears are failing to drop because of the condition and situation.*

*If we can be the causers, we can be the solvers.*

*Out Loud I Appeal*

*All decision makers take afforestation into consideration.*

*I appeal and cry again.*

*To all decision makers to raise awareness on climate change and  
children’s participation to the nation, because it states an (Africa fit for children.)*



Nohelia Talavera/Save the Children

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The climate crisis is fundamentally and irreparably reshaping our world, with grave implications for the rights of current and future generations of children. When ranked by income, the top 50% of states are responsible for 86% of cumulative global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, while the lower half are responsible for just 14%<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, it is the children of low- and middle-income countries that bear the brunt of losses and damage to health and human capital, land, cultural heritage, indigenous and local knowledge, and biodiversity as a result of climate change<sup>2</sup>. Without drastic mitigation action to reduce emissions and limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, led by high-income and high-emitting countries and informed by children's best interests and identified priorities, **the children of these low- and middle-income countries will be burdened with the most dangerous impacts of the climate crisis. They have inherited a problem not of their own making.**

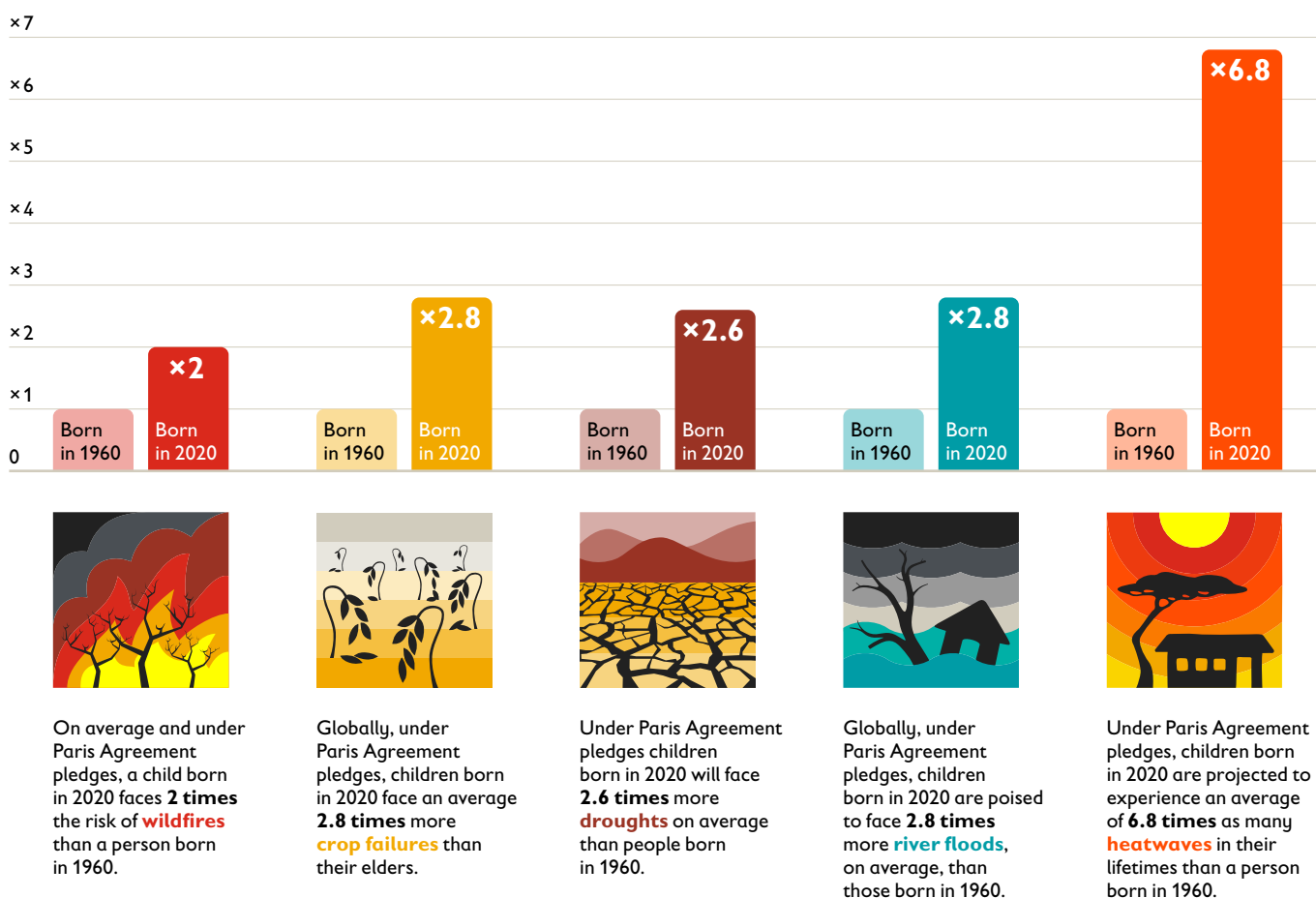
As confirmed in the August 2021 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the physical science basis of climate change, unsustainable human activity is unequivocally responsible for rapid warming of the planet<sup>3</sup>. Already, many of the planet’s vital signs – such as greenhouse gas concentrations, oceanic heating, and ice mass loss – have reached critical levels, leading to an unprecedented surge in extreme events directly related to climate change. Sustained by the vested interests of fossil fuel and other environmentally destructive industries, and magnified by inaction on the part of the high-income governments most responsible for climate impacts, climate change is giving rise to an intergenerational child rights crisis.

The inadequacy of most of the climate pledges outlined in each state’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) following the Paris Agreement will have serious consequences for children and future generations. New modelling developed by an international team of climate researchers, led by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, finds that under Paris Agreement pledges, a child born in 2020 will experience on average twice as many wildfires, 2.8 times the exposure to crop failure, 2.6 times as many drought events, 2.8 times as many river floods, and 6.8 times more heatwaves across their lifetimes, compared to a person born in 1960<sup>4</sup>.

The data shows that it is the children of many low- and middle-income countries who will continue to bear the brunt of worsening climate change. This will be compounded for some children – particularly those exposed to multiple hazards; those living through conflict; those most profoundly impacted by COVID-19; and those experiencing inequality and discrimination on the basis of gender, disability, indigeneity, displacement or other, often intersecting factors. Climate change is inextricably linked to wider issues of inequality and failures to uphold children’s basic rights. The future for children already suffering the worst impacts of climate change is looking increasingly dire.

**Figure 1**  
Lifetime exposure to extreme events under Paris Agreement pledges for children born in 2020 compared to that of a person born in 1960

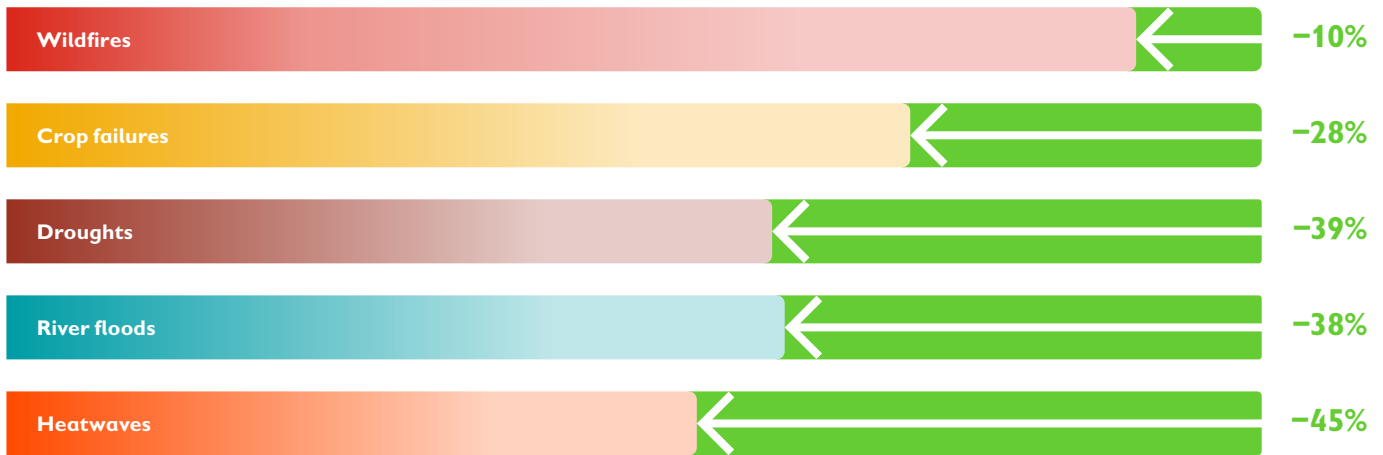
Increase in exposure to extreme events over lifetime





This same modelling, however, finds that there is an opportunity, as well as an urgent need, to act: compared to Paris Agreement pledges, limiting warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels will reduce the additional lifetime exposure of newborns to heatwaves by 45%, droughts by 39%, river floods by 38%, crop failures by 28%, and wildfire by 10%. These differences will allow more children to access their rights to services, to meet basic needs, to participation, and to a future. Leadership in climate action on the part of the high-income countries most responsible for climate change, particularly for financing and adaptation, will also yield multiple social, environmental, and economic returns: investment of \$1.8 trillion globally in five key areas of adaptation over a period of ten years could generate \$7.1 trillion in total net benefits<sup>5</sup>.

**Figure 2**  
Potential reduction of additional lifetime exposure to extreme events of children born in 2020 by limiting warming to 1.5°C instead of higher temperature under Paris Agreement pledges.



Locally-led and child-sensitive action on climate change is increasingly becoming an economic necessity, as the costs of responding to humanitarian crises resulting from extreme weather events rise. In addition, low- and middle-income countries are accruing disproportionate losses and damages as a result of climate change, and productivity in key sectors, such as agriculture, is being lost. Despite this, and in the face of now-overwhelming scientific evidence that the world’s window of opportunity to act is quickly closing, commitments to climate action, finance, and children’s participation in decision-making, remain dangerously inadequate.



Mohamed Osman/Save the Children



Pablo Barnes / Save the Children

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To address climate injustice head on, deliver on the promises made to children in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, governments, donors, the private sector, and multilateral agencies must:

- **Take ambitious and urgent action now to limit warming to a maximum of 1.5°C** above pre-industrial levels, including by rapidly phasing out the use and subsidy of fossil fuels.
- **Increase commitments to climate finance** for both mitigation and adaptation in recognition that the climate crisis is a child rights issue that affects children first and worst. This includes fulfilling the unmet pledge to mobilise at least \$100 billion annually, with at least 50% contributing to adaptation measures that support poorer countries in managing the unavoidable impacts of climate change and pursuing clean development pathways.
- **Recognise children as equal stakeholders and key agents of change** in addressing the climate and environmental crisis, including by establishing child-friendly mechanisms and platforms to facilitate children's formal engagement in climate policy making.
- **Scale up social protection systems** to address the increasing impacts of climate shocks on children and their families, with the ambition to move to universal child benefits over time as a way to improve child well-being and build resilience.

As governments prepare to meet, assess progress, and accelerate their commitments to the next five-year cycle of the Paris Agreement, they must recall not only their obligations to act in the best interests of children, but the agency and capacities of children themselves. The world's children – particularly those in low- and middle-income countries and those experiencing inequality and discrimination wherever they live – have contributed the least to the climate emergency but have the most to lose if this crisis continues unabated. It is imperative that children are present at this critical juncture – not as inspiration, but as rights-holders, as the most acutely-affected, and as agents of urgent, necessary, and transformative change.

**‘Please listen to us and give additional importance to our voice. We promise you to become part of the solution’**

**Diya**  
16-year-old girl  
from Bangladesh

In developing this report, the Child Reference Group also identified their own recommendations. These are:

### Children’s recommendations

- Decision-makers should take **all information** that they receive about climate change into account when making decisions about **climate change**.
- **Reduce fossil fuels** and move towards **renewable and green energy**.
- Governments should give **more support to communities** to cut pollution and fossil fuel use, and make sure that green and renewable energy alternatives are **accessible for all people** to use.
- **Promote public transportation** as a way to cut emissions. This could also make it easier for people to continue to access work and school even during extreme weather events.
- We need to make sure that **every child can always reach their rights**.
- Children are the leaders of tomorrow, and so **children’s voices always need to be respected**, taken seriously, and included in decisions on climate change.
- Everyone, including parents, teachers, and leaders, needs to understand how **climate is impacting children’s rights**, and children’s **right to participate** in decisions on climate change.
- Child participation needs to be **inclusive for all children**, including children who may need additional support to participate.
- Children should be given **good information** to participate in decision-making processes on climate in a way **that makes sense to them**.
- People who work in fossil fuels industries need to have **access to social protection** as they could lose their job when we move to green and renewable energy sources.

### Endnotes

1: Ritchie, H. 2018. ‘Global inequalities in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions’, *Our World in Data*. Available from <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-by-income-region>.

2: UN Conference of the Parties, 2013. *Report of the Conference of the Parties on its eighteenth session, held in Doha from 26 November to 8 December 2012 – Addendum Part Two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties at its eighteenth session*. Available from <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2012/cop18/eng/08a01.pdf>.

3: IPCC, 2021. *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S. L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M. I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R. Matthews, T. K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

4: Methodology: The findings draw on five sources of data, including newly-generated simulations of climate impacts across five extreme event categories; the United Nations World Population Prospects; global mean temperature scenarios compiled in support of the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C; population reconstructions and projections; and country-scale cohort size data provided by the Wittgenstein Centre’s Human Capital Data Explorer, <http://dataexplorer.wittgensteincentre.org/wcde-v2/>. The research calculates the exposure of an average person to climate impacts across their lifetime in 178 countries, 11 regions and the globe under climate action commitments originally announced by governments in NDCs developed after the introduction of the Paris Agreement. It then compares different age groups to calculate conservative estimates of lifetime extreme event occurrence as a consequence of climate change, while controlling for changes in life expectancy.

5: Global Commission on Adaptation, 2019. *Adapt Now: A Global Call for Leadership on Climate Resilience*. Available from [https://gca.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GlobalCommission\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://gca.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GlobalCommission_Report_FINAL.pdf).



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#### Published by

Save the Children International  
[www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

First published September 2021

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Cover design: Kristoffer Nilsen

Cover photo: Hanna Adcock/Save the Children Stripes adapted from Hawkins, E. *Show Your Stripes*. 2018–2019. <https://showyourstripes.info/> to show years 1960–2020 only.

Report design and infographics: John F McGill