

United Nations Committee on
the Rights of the Child

General Comment No. 26

on

Children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change



Version for Children

2023

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important agreement by countries to promise to protect children's rights. The Convention explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities of governments to protect, promote and fulfil children's rights.



The Committee on the Rights of the Child is a group of 18 experts in children's rights who come from all over the world. The Committee meets three times each year in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss how children's rights are being promoted and protected in each country that has signed the Convention. The Committee also makes recommendations to each country on how they should improve children's rights.

The Committee has written a document called a General Comment which explains to governments how children's rights are related to the environment and climate change, and what governments must do to protect them. You are now reading a version of the General Comment that has been created for children, together with members of a global Children's Advisory Team which was created to help the Committee to develop General Comment No.26.

Introduction

Environmental harm is a significant threat to children's rights globally. Children are demanding immediate action, and their rights must be protected. A clean, healthy and sustainable environment is both a human right itself, and necessary for children to enjoy their rights. This General Comment explains why urgent environmental and climate action is needed and what governments must do to protect **all** the rights children have. It also makes it clear that governments must protect the rights of children today as well as children in future generations.

Children's efforts to stand up for their environmental rights motivated the Committee to create this General Comment and children have played a very important role in shaping it: **16,333 children** from **121 countries** shared their views and ideas in consultations designed with members of the Children's Advisory Team for General Comment No. 26. The quotes from children in the General Comment are from the consultations that took place.

"I would like to tell them [adults] that we are the future generations and if you destroy the planet, where will we live?!"

(Boy, aged 13, India)

An animated video and poster version can be found at:



childrightsenvironment.org



How are children's rights related to the environment and climate change?

All children's rights are connected and equally important. Some rights are particularly threatened by environmental harm and climate change. Some rights also play an important role in helping to protect children's rights - such as their right to education.



Article 2

Right to non-discrimination

Environmental harm can be a bigger threat for certain groups of children, especially Indigenous children, children of minority groups, children with disabilities, and children living in places more affected by disasters and climate change. Governments need to collect information to learn more about the inequalities between groups, and take specific actions to resolve them. When governments take action on environmental issues, they must take extra care to not have a negative effect on children.



Article 3

Best interests of the child

When making decisions about the environment and climate change, governments must consider how children will be impacted, and how they will support the wellbeing and development of children growing up today and in the future.

Article 6

Right to life, survival and development

Children should be able to live, grow up and develop in healthy, safe environments and have the support they need. Their lives should never be put at risk because of environmental harm like pollution or lead exposure.



Article 12

Right to be heard

Children should be taken seriously by adults and have a say on issues related to the environment and climate change. Governments should involve children when making decisions about the environment and climate change, and make sure they give feedback to children about how their views were considered.



Articles 13, 15

Right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly

Children often stand up for their environmental rights as human rights defenders. Many children also spend time with friends and groups where they exchange information and ideas. Governments should support children to express themselves by providing safe and empowering spaces for them to do so. Governments should adopt laws to protect child human rights defenders.



Articles 13, 17

Access to information

Governments should make sure that children have access to clear, accurate environmental and climate-related information, including information about plans and decisions being made, and about actions that children can take themselves. Information should be shared in different ways so that children of different ages and backgrounds can understand it.

Article 19

The right to freedom from all forms of violence

Environmental harm and climate change can lead to unstable situations, conflicts and inequalities, leaving children at more risk of physical and psychological violence. Governments should make more effort to protect children by investing in services that are for children and by working to solve the root causes of violence.



Article 24

Right to health

Children's physical and mental health should not be affected by climate change, pollution, unhealthy ecosystems, and loss of biodiversity. If a child experiences health issues, they must be able to access healthcare and support.



Articles 26, 27

Right to social security and decent standard of living

Children should be able to access safe food, clean water, decent housing and materials needed for them to live and grow. Governments need to make sure children are not living in poverty or unsafe conditions.

Articles 28, 29

Right to education

Children should be given environmental education that is accurate and in ways that they understand. Environmental education should support children to connect with, and respect, the environment. The places where children learn should be safe from environmental harm.



Article 30

The rights of Indigenous children and children of minority groups

Indigenous children and children of minority groups' lives, survival and cultural practices are often very connected to their natural environment. Governments should make sure to protect their rights and involve children in all decisions being made about their environment.

Article 31

Right to rest and play

Children should be able to play and be active in clean, safe places and connect with our natural world. Governments need to consider where and how children can play and rest when they make plans for new neighbourhoods or places where children may visit.



Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

The Committee explains that children have the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Children need a clean environment in order to enjoy all of their human rights. Children should have access to clean air and water, safe climates, healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, healthy food and non-polluted environments.

What do governments need to do to protect children's rights, including their right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment?



Respect



Access to justice



Cooperation

- **Respect, protect, and fulfil** children's rights by taking bold, concrete steps and keeping their promises to make sure every child grows up in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

- Carry out regular **Child Rights Impact Assessments** to understand (and resolve) how their decisions about the environment will impact (or are impacting) children - paying special attention to how children of all ages and backgrounds might be impacted differently.

- Make sure **businesses** also respect children's rights by creating laws, regulations and policies to prevent companies from polluting the environment and harming children, and to make sure businesses do not hide their environmental impact.

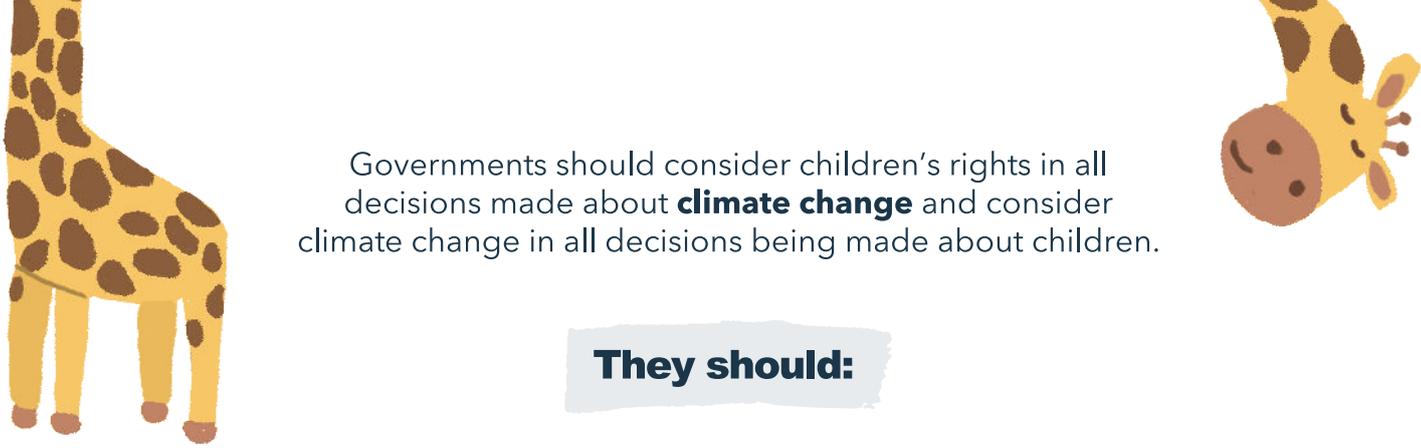
- Make sure children are supported to **access justice** - that is, solutions, support and compensation for the harm and consequences they are experiencing - at national, regional and international levels.

- **Cooperate internationally** with other governments as environmental problems do not stop at a country's border. Countries that are most responsible for negatively impacting the environment and have the most resources should take more action than others, and support countries that are impacted the most.

"Global warming and other problems cannot be solved unless there is global cooperation."

(Girl, 11, China)





Governments should consider children's rights in all decisions made about **climate change** and consider climate change in all decisions being made about children.

They should:

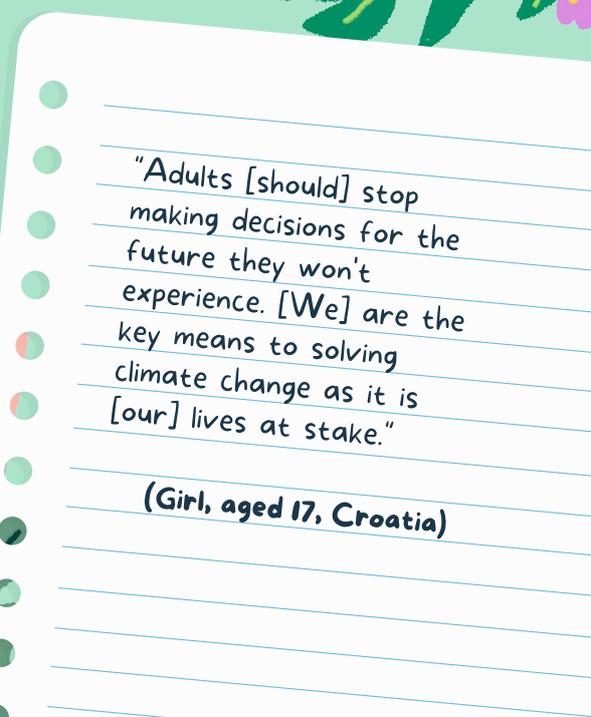
- **Mitigate** the impact of climate change. This includes keeping their promises to limit the warming of the planet, following what scientists tell us about climate change, and taking urgent action.

- Include children in the development of **adaptation** plans, decisions and solutions and protecting children who are already experiencing the effects of climate change. This includes strengthening school buildings and water pipes against storms, flooding and other weather extremes, and providing food supplies in cases of emergency.

- Provide financial and technical assistance to countries experiencing **losses and damages** that are impacting children's rights.

- Make sure **businesses**, including global businesses in more than one country, do not negatively impact children's rights by ensuring businesses rapidly reduce their emissions and encouraging renewable energies.

- Make sure that **climate finance** does not support action that may violate children's rights.



"Adults [should] stop making decisions for the future they won't experience. [We] are the key means to solving climate change as it is [our] lives at stake."

(Girl, aged 17, Croatia)

General Comment

Child rights, environment and climate change



Terre des Hommes
International Federation

