CHILDREN AND THE UN CLIMATE COPS

A primary consideration for their future in the present

Children (all individuals under 18) make up about **one-third** of the global population and are recognized by the UN as **rights holders**, whose **voices and perspectives must be considered** in decisions that affect their lives. Children are agents of change and an autonomous group, distinct from youth.

Investing in children today is not only a matter of fulfilling their rights but also a strategic approach to ensuring sustainable development across generations. Yet children, in particular girls, remain among the groups most severely affected by the climate crisis, facing **disproportionate risks** to their health, education, and overall well-being, as described in the UNCRC's General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change.

Importantly, the International Court of Justice's recent Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change stated that the common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, precautionary principle and intergenerational equity should be guiding principles for all state obligations in the context of climate change. The principle of intergenerational equity is particularly significant as it entails that the rights of children and the burden on future generations when fulfilling state obligations should be a key consideration and a guiding map towards climate action. The Court also confirmed that States have legal obligations under climate treaties to address climate change through mitigation and adaptation, emphasizing the duty to prevent significant harm to the climate system, human rights and child rights.

How have children been considered in UN Climate COPs so far?

Research conducted by Alana Institute and LACLIMA highlighted that **the development of the topic went through three phases from COP1 to COP29**:

	YEAR	CHILDREN	YOUTH	GIRL	YOUNG	FUTURE GENERATIONS
SPORADIC MENTIONS	1992-2010	2	8	0	1	9
RISE OF THE THEME	2011-2017	12	21	0	0	4
STRATEGIC MENTIONS	2018-2024	77	123	13	8	4

Key milestones include the formal recognition of YOUNGO by the UNFCCC Secretariat (2009); the establishment of the Action for Climate Empowerment (2021); the creation of the Presidency Youth Climate Champion (2023); the convening of the **Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate Change** (2024, mandated by Decision 1/CMA.5) and the inclusion of children, their education and health in the Global Adaptation Goal (Decision 3/CMA.6, para 21 (f)). Despite these milestones, much more can be done to build on this momentum.

Why are children a primary consideration?

Protecting children from the disproportionate impacts of climate change and upholding their rights, recognizing them as an autonomous group, means applying the principle of the best interests of the child as a **primary consideration**, in line with Article 3.1 of the CRC and GC26, to all climate-related decisions. Mainstreaming children's rights through linking the UNFCCC to the CRC offers an **innovative approach** to the international framework that promotes policy coherence and advances a climate governance model that is more **equitable, inclusive**, and **responsive** to children's unique vulnerabilities. It is worth noting that Parties to the Paris Agreement have agreed that they should respect, promote and consider the rights, distinct needs, and voices of children, as well as intergenerational equity.

What can COP30 deliver to strengthen the mainstreaming of children's rights across the UNFCCC to advance intergenerational equity?

Policy coherence	Whenever children are mentioned, include a reference to the principle of the best interests of the child as a "**primary consideration**". This implies that future COP and CMA decisions should promote policy coherence and advance towards a climate governance model that is more responsive to the unique vulnerabilities of children to climate change.
Expert dialogue on children and climate change	Ensure reference to the **Expert Dialogue on Children and Climate Change** under the UAE Dialogue on implementing the GST outcome, laying the groundwork for tangible follow-up action, as has already been suggested in the case of mountains: *[Welcomes the informal summary report on the expert dialogue on children and climate change and invites relevant work programmes and constituted bodies under the Convention and Paris Agreement to integrate the consideration of disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions in their existing mandates, activities and reporting processes, as appropriate;* *Further urges Parties and invites non-Party stakeholders to strengthen action and support to respond to the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children as a primary consideration through relevant national, regional and global planning and implementation processes.]*
Adaptation	The final list of GGA indicators includes child-sensitive, child-focused and age-disaggregated (where applicable) indicators aimed at reducing the vulnerabilities of children to climate change and monitor progress towards achieving the GGA targets (Decision 2/CMA.5, paras 9-10).
Mitigation	Support the urgent and equitable phase-out of the use and subsidy of fossil fuels and investment in renewable energy as quickly as possible, and rapidly addressing the poverty and inequality crisis, in a manner that protects children and avoids harming the most impacted communities.
Gender	In the new GAP: keep the incorporated mention of girls, including girls of African descent and Indigenous girls, across the priorities (A) related to capacity-building, (B) focused on participation and (D) on gender-responsive implementation.

Just Transition Work Program	Strengthen intergenerational equity and child rights language in the JTWP. Retain the incorporated mention recognizing the importance of ensuring broad and meaningful participation of children, and reinforce the reference to the prevention of child labour and the inclusion of the care economy by placing children and women at the center.
Finance	Incorporate language in the Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T, recognizing children as priority beneficiaries of climate finance, especially in developing countries and contexts of multidimensional vulnerability, considering health, education, food security, and social rights.
Loss and Damage	Ensure that resource allocation criteria under the Loss and Damage Fund include social indicators capturing children's vulnerability, especially in least developed countries, small island states, and conflict zones. These include recognizing children as a specific and distinct beneficiary group under the FRLD; and prioritising country-led and country-owned approaches to child-critical essential services within the Barbados Implementation Modalities and longer-term operational policies and procedures
ACE (Action for Climate Empowerment)	Establish children as cross-cutting priority groups across all six ACE elements: education, training, public awareness, public participation, access to information, and international cooperation
Action Agenda	Encourage the COP Presidency to integrate children's rights into their action agenda. A way to promote children's participation is the "MiniCOPs": local, autonomous experiences promoted by schools, CSOs or community groups that want to listen to the voices of children. At the national level, Parties can commit to accelerating inclusive, child- and youth-centred climate policies, action, and finance by joining the 67+ government signatories of the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action and by implementing GC26.

ACCESS THE QR CODE TO DOWNLOAD THE POLICY PAPER: bit.ly/paper-children-cop

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