



AT A GLANCE

CLIMATE CHANGE AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Hendra A Setyawan/ World Meteorological Organization

Young children, despite being least responsible for the crisis of climate change, bear the brunt of environmental-health and climate-related impacts due to their unique physiology. While children are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, they are also potential agents of change. Investing in early childhood development (ECD) brings a tangible return on investment for children, drives economic growth, and builds climate resilience.

The Impact of Climate Change on Young Children

Climate change represents a fundamental threat to children's rights, and it compromises the opportunity for children to grow up safe, healthy, well-nourished, happy, and learning.

WHAT WE KNOW:



Nearly 90 percent of the global health burden related to climate change is borne by children under five.

Sheffield and Lanigan, 2011



Children born in 2020 will experience, on average, **twice as many wildfires**, 2.8 times as much exposure to crop failure, 2.6 times as many drought events, 2.8 times as many river floods, and 6.8 times more heat waves across their lifetimes, compared to people born in 1960. Save the Children, 2021



More than 1.7 million premature deaths among children under five are caused by pollution and toxic substances annually.

WHO, 2017



Climate change significantly affects children's mental health and well-being. The stress and trauma are likely to disrupt the way children and caregivers interact. Ahdoot et al., 2015, Moore et al., 2007



By 2050, **the risk of hunger and malnutrition could rise by 20 percent globally**, and the majority of child deaths expected to occur as a result of climate change will be driven by undernutrition. World Food Programme, 2021



More than 43 million children have been displaced due to weather-related disasters over the last six years. UNICEF, 2023



Every year, **40 million children have their education disrupted** because of disasters exacerbated by climate change. Young children are especially impacted by these disruptions. UNICEF, 2023

Young children are particularly vulnerable to climate change:

- **They breathe twice as fast**, putting them at greater risk of respiratory illnesses from air pollution.
- **They have a higher metabolism and sweat less**; thus, they are uniquely at risk of heat stress, which can lead to dehydration, illness, and death.
- **Their immune systems are not fully developed**, and they are less able to fight diseases and infections. They drink more than adults compared to their body mass and are more greatly impacted by food insecurity or water scarcity. Their dependence on caregivers makes them particularly susceptible to the dangers of extreme weather events.



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ECDAN's Work in Climate Change

- Elevate the needs of young children and their caregivers in the global climate discourse through advocacy, communications, and partnership building.
- Advocate for investments in ECD as a means of building climate resilience.
- Support country-level partners to integrate ECD policies and services into national climate action plans.
- Mobilize cross-sectoral partners for collective action.

Advocacy Messages

Whether you are working at the global, regional, national, or local level, these advocacy messages are designed to engage key decision-makers to ensure the needs of young children and their caregivers are integrated into climate-sensitive policies and investments.

- Recognize and highlight the unique and specific impacts of climate change. Ensure that national climate-sensitive policies, systems, and action plans address the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on the youngest children and their caregivers.
- Invest in and accelerate research that improves our understanding of the potential health and education risks associated with climate change, as well as strategies and interventions to adapt to and mitigate those effects.
- Invest in greening education and early childhood systems to build climate resilience within children, teachers, parents, caregivers, schools, and communities.
- Empower and finance civil society to implement locally-led and child-sensitive actions on climate change, ensuring that the voices of the youngest children—as future custodians of our planet—are heard and integrated into early learning interventions.
- Develop climate-resilient health systems that support maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) outcomes and embed all five components of nurturing care into basic benefit packages and primary health care.

GET INVOLVED

ECD experts, advocates, and practitioners must take an active role to ensure the early years are adequately represented in national climate action plans and financing mechanisms. [Visit https://ecdan.org/themes-climate-change/](https://ecdan.org/themes-climate-change/) to learn more about how to get involved and participate in our upcoming webinar series on climate change and early childhood development.

Email Info@ecdan.org to learn about how you can get involved.

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