



ECDAN

Early Childhood Development Action Network

Early Childhood Development Climate Change Advocacy Guide



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I. OVERVIEW: BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Climate change represents a fundamental threat to children's rights and compromises their opportunity to grow up physically and mentally safe, healthy, well nourished, happy, and learning. These threats are becoming increasingly tangible and severe, with more and more children being affected by displacement, disruptions to their education, and lack of access to adequate nutrition and life-saving health services due to climate change. While all children will bear the brunt of these negative impacts, young children are particularly vulnerable.

As early childhood development (ECD) practitioners and advocates, we must ensure that key decision-makers are addressing the rights and specific needs of young children and their caregivers, in all their diversity, within climate action plans and policies. **This guide is designed to help ECD partners identify entry points for advocacy in their own countries and provide tactical ideas and resources to integrate early childhood policies and services into national policies and systems.**

II. KEY MESSAGES

Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) partners have developed [key messages](#) that provide an overarching narrative with supporting proof points. You can use these key messages to prepare for meetings, integrate them into external communications, or develop your own local and contextualized resources.





III. ENTRY POINTS INTO THE CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLANS FOR ECD ADVOCATES

Climate change is a complicated issue. There are many good resources on the [science behind climate change](#), the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC), and the [implications on health](#).

As advocates for early childhood, we do not need to be technical experts on climate change. But we must be at the table for the policy and financing discussions happening in many countries as governments develop their plans to respond climate change—such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)—and the critical conversations happening around climate financing, such as those related to the loss and damage fund. We must also engage at the global level at events like the [Conference of Parties](#) (COP) to ensure that the rights and needs of young children and their caregivers are integrated into international negotiations and agreements. These advocacy opportunities are especially important because we can offer a solution to climate change—building resilience and supporting climate adaptation through high-quality ECD policies and services.

Potential entry points for advocacy may vary greatly depending on countries and contexts. The key is to understand who we are trying to influence and where the opportunities may be in your context to integrate ECD priorities into the climate-related policies and programs that are moving forward. Following are several important entry points or pathways that could provide advocacy opportunities in your country or context.



A. Greening Education Systems

Many countries are thinking about how they can develop climate-smart education systems that are better able to address and adapt to climate change. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's [Greening Education Partnership](#) provides an important opportunity to learn more about how countries are building climate-smart education systems. It has four key pillars for transforming education:

- Greening schools.
- Greening curriculum.
- Greening teacher training and education systems' capacities.
- Greening communities.

In addition, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN's) Commission on Education and Communication is leading an international movement—the Nature-based Education Initiative—that mobilizes global organizations to diagnose, advocate, and implement international projects around nature-based education.

Whether at the country or global levels, it is critical that early childhood care and education (ECCE) is integrated into the greening-education agenda. Often, the pre-primary years are not included in education



system development—and advocacy is needed to ensure an inclusive, holistic approach is taken so the investments and strategies are not solely focused on the primary years and beyond.

One important resource is [Save the Children's CRESTA](#) program, which offers climate-sensitive approaches to ECCE program development and service delivery and can provide helpful guidance that will inform your strategy and advocacy.

We need your voice to ensure that the needs of young children, parents and caregivers, and early childhood educators are addressed, and that “greening education” does not only begin during primary school.

Actions You Can Take

- Join the Greening Education Partnership by [filling out this form](#).
- Join the IUCN Nature-based Education Initiative by emailing natalie.cox@iucn.org.
- Learn how other countries are [approaching greening education through these country profiles](#).
- Find the entry points for greening education in your own country, and advocate for the inclusion of the accompanying systems development, curriculum design, and teacher training in ECCE.
- Engage with school leaders and municipalities on the greening-education agenda.
- Use the following greening-education key messages to inform your thinking and strategy.



Key Messages: Integrating Early Childhood into the Greening Education Agenda

The emerging greening-education agenda provides an opportunity to make investments during the earliest years of life that will lay the foundation for climate resilience and lifelong learning. Policymakers, funders, and implementers can integrate early childhood into the greening-education agenda through these practical actions.

Build and retrofit climate-smart ECCE facilities:

- Construct and retrofit ECCE facilities to ensure children's rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.
- Train engineers and city planners in child-friendly, climate-smart design and planning best practices.
- Create safe, green, and natural play spaces that are resilient to environmental hazards and built with natural materials.
- Promote and support the creation and use of play materials and natural learning resources made from local, recycled, and low-cost materials.

Develop green curriculum for ECCE:

- Ensure social-emotional development is central to all ECCE programming to build resilience.
- Engage parents and caregivers to promote young children's learning and appreciation of nature.
- Build children's love of nature and knowledge of the causes and impacts of climate change, increase their skills and values to care for and protect the natural environment, and empower them and support their agency to take action and make choices that can create positive change.

Support early childhood providers and teachers:

- Integrate early environmental education into teacher training and standards at all levels.
- Provide incentives for teachers and higher education institutions to put more emphasis on social-emotional development and skill development within a natural environment.
- Build a bridge between the teacher and caregivers to ensure that there is continuous learning both in school and at home to advance the greening-education agenda.

Invest in greening communities:

- Ensure the needs of young children and ECCE programs are addressed in community climate-action plans, including investments in green play spaces.
- Develop community-wide plans to prepare for emergencies that include ECCE programs.
- Integrate nature-based solutions and knowledge from traditional, ancestral, and local communities into local climate action plans.



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B. Promoting Responsive Health Care and Strengthening Health Systems

Similarly, many countries are undergoing processes and policy development to make health systems better able to respond to climate change and to reduce carbon emissions. In November 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and the United Nations Population Fund released a [call to action and issue brief](#) on protecting maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) from the impacts of climate change.

The WHO-led [Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health](#) is a coalition of member states and stakeholders working to build climate-resilient health systems. In addition, global and national campaigns focused on establishing universal health

coverage and strengthening primary health care provide additional entry points for the inclusion of nurturing care into health services. Similar to initiatives focused on greening education systems, advocates at the country level can explore opportunities to integrate early childhood development (ECD) and nurturing care into health system strengthening. This includes enhancing outdoor spaces for service providers, improving family and patient care in health facilities, incorporating ECD into training programs for service providers, optimizing service delivery, and shaping policies that align with climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. Leveraging the growing political momentum around climate action can help drive these critical integrations.

Actions You Can Take

- Understand the [health implications of climate change on young children and pregnant women](#).
- Tap into the universal health coverage movement, and advocate for inclusion of nurturing care into primary health care systems and services.
- Pledge your commitment to [Protecting maternal, newborn and child health from the impacts of climate change: A call for action](#). You can [sign your organization on here](#).
- Use the following health-related key messages to inform your thinking and strategy.



Key Messages: Early Childhood and Climate Resilient Health Systems

Develop climate-resilient health systems that support MNCH outcomes:

- Embed all five components of nurturing care (good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for learning) into basic benefit packages for primary health care.
- Promote and implement actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions of health systems.
- Leverage climate-related financing to enhance and expand the climate resilience of the health sector, specifically targeting MNCH needs.
- Strengthen monitoring systems to better track the impact of climate change on MNCH outcomes.

Conduct research to address data gaps on the impact of climate change on MNCH—particularly in low- and middle-income countries:

- Invest in and accelerate research that improves our understanding of the health risks of climate change and that formulates strategies and interventions to reduce the negative health effects.
- Integrate findings into health worker training and health care systems strengthening efforts, including support for community health workers.

Improve cross-sectoral collaboration and systems integration to improve MNCH service delivery and disaster response:

- Strengthen collaboration between different departments and units at all levels of the health system (including the private sector) to promote a coordinated, cross-sectoral response to climate-related health impacts that addresses the specific needs of MNCH.
- Build the capacity of the health system to strengthen available platforms for nurturing care—such as organized childcare, home visitation, and parenting support interventions—particularly in climate vulnerable countries.



C. Protecting Children's Rights to a Clean Environment

Climate change represents an inherent threat to children's rights. More than 150 countries have recognized the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and many governments and advocates are looking to ensure this right is upheld in global, regional, and national climate agreements. In 2023, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued [General comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](#), which provided legal guidance on the obligations of governments to protect children from environmental harm. Advocates now have a legal framework to hold governments accountable for upholding those rights.

The right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is also foundational to ECD. As a result, we must not only advocate for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and phasing out fossil fuels, but also, we must assess how early childhood settings can reduce their carbon footprint while fostering a just, sustainable, and green transition for the sector.

Actions You Can Take:

- Use this [advocacy tool](#) designed to support civil society organizations on reporting environmental harm to the [United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child](#).
- Learn more by participating in the [Our Rights, Our Planet Online Training](#).
- Understand the local impact. You can use these briefs by the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood on [air pollution](#) and [flooding](#) as examples from the Asia-Pacific region.
- Support the youth and parent advocacy movements and create platforms for young advocates and caregivers to speak out about the needs of young children and their caregivers.



D. Ensuring Early Childhood Policies and Services are Integrated into National Climate Action Plans and Climate Financing

In some countries, these efforts are happening on parallel, sector-specific tracks. In other countries, a cross-sectoral approach is being taken through the development of climate action plans. According to the UNFCCC, parties must submit climate action plans (also known as [NDCs](#)) by 2025. Countries must submit these action plans every five years. However, [an initial analysis by UNICEF from 2020 and 2021 revealed that 66 percent of the plans that were submitted failed to adequately address the needs of children](#). UNICEF [conducted an additional analysis](#) in 2022 on child-sensitive climate policies within NDCs, providing a deeper assessment of child sensitivity in climate and environmental policies, plans, and actions. Climate Watch and UNICEF also partnered on a [database that provides up-to-date data on child-sensitive policies within NDCs](#). You can search by country or keyword to identify where and how ECD is being integrated into NDCs. According to this database, only three countries specifically reference “early childhood” in their NDC.

[National Adaptation Plans](#) provide another avenue for advocacy. Some organizations are developing reports to share with policymakers to inform the development of these strategies. This [report from Early Years Climate Action provides recommendations to US stakeholders and may be useful for your own advocacy](#).

While the details of the [Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage](#) are still being negotiated, and significant tensions remain regarding its operation and overall funding levels, it represents another critical mechanism—and advocacy opportunity—for positioning ECD as a vital strategy for addressing climate change.

These country action plans and financing mechanisms offer a critical opportunity for integrating early childhood priorities, but it is important to understand the processes your country is taking and where the most effective or accessible entry points for influence may be.

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Actions You Can Take:

- Advocate for your country to sign on to the [Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#).
- [Research your country's NDC](#) or [NAP](#) to understand if ECD is included, and assess the gaps. Use these tools developed by [GPE/Save the Children](#) and [UNICEF](#) to learn how to engage in the development of NDCs.
- Promote the inclusion of ECD national-level policy opportunities (NDCs, NAPs, national climate change legislation, etc.) through communications and advocacy.



E. The Expert Dialogue on Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Children

At COP28, the UNFCCC issued a [draft decision of the first global stocktake](#) that called for an expert dialogue on the disproportionate impact of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions. This dialogue, which happened in June 2024, was an important opportunity to highlight the needs of young children and their caregivers, offer policy solutions, and create a mechanism for ensuring the needs of children are integrated into COP decisions and agreements. It will be important for advocates to keep up the pressure and push for the [solutions](#) discussed at the dialogue to be formally adopted into UNFCCC processes and agreements.

ECDAN [submitted this statement](#) on behalf of partners to highlight the specific needs of young children and their caregivers along with the potential return on investment for investing in the early years.

IV. GET INVOLVED LOCALLY

There are many advocacy actions you can take that will elevate the needs of young children and their caregivers. Because of the high visibility and political momentum behind addressing climate change in many countries, integrating ECD into existing movements and entry points—whether it is greening education, universal health care, climate-smart health systems, or developing country climate action plans—is an important strategy.

Become informed	Use our resource hub and other partner resources to learn about how climate change impacts young children. Identify opportunities at the country level for building partnerships and engaging in advocacy.
Organize a planning meeting to get consensus on your advocacy objectives and strategy	Meet with like-minded partners, define your advocacy objective, and plan your strategy. The strategy will provide a clear pathway for achieving your advocacy objective.
Map the policy process	Political mapping charts the policy process and decision-makers at each step. It is a critical tool that informs your advocacy strategy, key targets, and messaging. The entry points listed in this advocacy guide may not be transparent and are often complicated, so advocates must understand which ministry (or ministries) are leading, what their role is, and who has decision-making authority.
Meet with government decision-makers	Many countries are drafting climate-action plans and are working to develop more climate-resilient education and health systems. These are critical moments for advocates to engage with policymakers who have jurisdiction over early childhood services and systems. Organize policy dialogues or briefings to highlight the particular vulnerabilities of children, and present ECD as a solution. Use these key messages (or create your own) to develop your materials and form your argument.
Participate in coalitions or form a working group	Climate change and environmental degradation impact everyone on the planet. As a result, influential partnerships and coalitions have emerged in many countries, bringing diverse organizations together with shared objectives and messaging. By partnering with organizations focused on climate and environmental justice, public health, child rights, education, women's empowerment, physician and medical professional groups, among others, you can gain valuable insights, build strategic relationships, and amplify key messages for young children and their caregivers. Find national or regional opportunities to link early childhood with broader conversations around climate change and country action plans. Conduct stakeholder mapping to identify potential partners to connect with in your country.



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Meet with journalists or an editorial board	Increasing public awareness through earned media coverage—publicity that is gained through promotional efforts, such as press releases, media outreach, and public relations campaigns—about the impact of the climate change on young children, parents, and caregivers is critical to building political will for action. Determine what the most influential news publications are for your target audience and set up a meeting with journalists or the editorial board to understand their editorial calendar and how this issue might fit into it. For journalists, it is always best to make their work easier by creating a press kit.
Write an op-ed	Op-eds and open letters signed by multiple high-profile champions can be another powerful tool for building public support on a policy issue. An op-ed by a well-respected, credible, and influential stakeholder (or multiple stakeholders representing the issue through different lenses) can elevate a policy issue within decision-maker circles. See the recent op-ed by the executive directors of ECDAN and the Africa Early Childhood Network as an example.
Mobilize partners with a call to action or petition	Calls to action or petitions can be effective tools to mobilize partners around a common agenda and demonstrate power in numbers. You can deliver the letter to specific decision-makers, and use it as an opportunity to generate press coverage. Here is a recent example from ECDAN.
Collect testimonials from ECD professionals and caregivers	Grassroots voices are often the most powerful and influential. Testimonials from children, youth, ECD professionals, parents and caregivers, and youth advocates can help to highlight the personal impact of climate change on young children and their families. Organize a meeting or press event where you have an opportunity to highlight different perspectives of young children, or collect videos and interviews of parents and caregivers speaking about the issue of climate change and integrate them into your events and communications strategy. Use creative and age-appropriate ways to include and elevate young children’s voices—and this can be done through different forms of expression, such as photos, videos, or drawings.



V. COMMUNICATIONS

Concerted, continued efforts are needed to build awareness about the disproportionate impact of climate change on young children. You can use these sample [social media posts](#) to highlight the evidence and your call to action. Leverage social media to promote [key messages](#) and mobilize partners.

The production of accessible materials, using simplified and visual language, is crucial for engaging children and youth in climate discussions. Adapting the content to different age groups and cultural contexts can ensure that all children have the necessary tools to understand and actively participate.

VI. RESOURCE HUB

ECDAN has developed a [resource hub](#) for ECD and climate change. Here you will find reports, evidence, and partner initiatives. If you have resources you would like ECDAN to highlight, please email info@ecdan.org.

VII. PARTNER RESOURCES

Learn more about how partners are working to elevate children within the climate change agenda by visiting our partner websites.

- A. [ECDAN Climate Resource Hub](#)
- B. Regional ECD networks
 - 1. [Africa Early Childhood Network \(AfECN\)](#)
 - 2. [Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood \(ARNEC\)](#)
 - 3. [Arab Network for Early Childhood \(ANECD\)](#)
 - 4. [International Step by Step Association \(ISSA\)](#)
- C. [Alana Institute](#)
- D. [Capita](#)
- E. [The CARE Climate Justice Center](#)
- F. [Children's Environmental Rights Initiative](#)
- G. [Early Opportunities](#)
- H. [Global Partnership for Education and Building the Climate Resilience of Children and Communities through the Education Sector \(BRACE\) initiative](#)
- I. [PLAN International](#)
- J. [Save the Children](#)
- K. [UNICEF](#)
- L. [UNESCO](#)
- M. [WHO](#)
- N. [World Bank](#)



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