



ARNEC
Asia-Pacific Regional Network
for Early Childhood

Their future is at stake. Protecting the youngest children is integral to the climate crisis response.

A call to address the climate crisis to protect the well-being and development of young children

The climate crisis is putting young children at risk. Changing climates have exposed the youngest children to the impacts and stresses of diverse climate and environmental hazards, and although they are the most vulnerable and most adversely affected, they possess the least resources to respond and cope with these impacts and are least able to protect themselves from harm (ChildFund Alliance et al., 2019).

Our climate is our children's future. Their future depends on our actions now.

Now is the time when we must put young children at the centre of climate change discussions. We need to make early childhood development (ECD) integral in all policy discussions on climate change and all commitments to build adaptive capacity and resilience to the impacts of climate change at global and country levels.

Almost every child on earth, according to UNICEF (2021), is exposed to at least one of these major impacts of climate change. In the Asia-Pacific region, many young children live in zones of severe droughts or extremely high flood occurrence, such as in the Philippines, Viet Nam, India, and China, and more than 115 million children are exposed to extremely high-risk tropical cyclones and typhoons. Such climate-linked natural disasters have intensified human poverty and vulnerability, especially among the youngest – a situation only exacerbated by internal displacement and migration, according to UNICEF (2015).

Climate-related disasters wreak havoc on families and communities, increasing adversity and toxic stress among young children, which harms brain development, and increasing

anxiety and depression among their adult caregivers. Malnutrition burdens are aggravated among children below five from the loss of livelihoods and increased food insecurity.

There are increasing physical and health risks to children as well; for example, the likelihood of serious illness, death, and neurological impairment due to the increasing transmission rates of malaria, dengue and yellow fever, which mostly affect children under five, is rising.

Let the voices of young children be heard. Their futures depend on our collective actions to secure a safe, nurturing, and sustainable environment now.

Climate change impacts therefore have serious implications for the nurturing care of young children and continue to threaten their lives as well as that of their caregivers – and, in many ways, make it more difficult to access to quality early childhood development services.

On behalf of the youngest children around the world in the lead up to the next five-year cycle of the Paris Agreement, the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) calls on governments to ensure that these children grow up in a healthy and livable planet and are able to reach their full potential through nurturing, sustainable environments by committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by half by 2030 and to zero by 2050 in accordance with the recommendation of the IPCC report. In particular, high-income countries which are largely responsible for greenhouse gas emissions need to show greater commitment to effective climate change responses.

We call on governments to achieve national climate change targets in the long run and to donors, the private sector, the civil society, and other partners and multistakeholders to commit to the following actions:

- Providing adequate and predictable investments in nurturing care and wellbeing: good health and nutrition, early learning opportunities, responsive care, and security and protection for young children.
- Ensuring the ability of ECD programs and services to build resilience and adaptability capacity in support of young children and their families in the context of climate change.
- Ensuring that climate-sensitive policies and national adaptation plans include a focus on the youngest children.
- Driving local solutions by empowering civil society to implement locally-led and child-sensitive actions on climate change.
- Addressing reversals in the SDGs because of the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, especially in ECD, education, and WASH, among others.
- Prioritising equity issues in ECD recovery plans and programs so that the most vulnerable young children are not made more vulnerable due to the impacts of climate change.
- Bridging efforts between scientists, policy makers, climate change advocates and ECD practitioners and advocates to ensure that public investments and decisions around climate change are evidence-based in support of young children and ECD.

We stand with the youngest children and urge for their voices to be heard. For the protection and well-being of young children we call on all to commit to bold, sustainable, and measurable actions at the global and country levels to lessen global warming, reduce the impacts of climate change, and secure a healthy and livable planet.

Early childhood development must be integral to the global climate change response. We need to act now to realise the youngest children's rights to survive and thrive and to defend them against the climate crisis that has so unfairly been handed down to them.

References

ChildFund International, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes International Federation, & World Vision. (2019). The Global Climate Crisis: A Child Rights Crisis. Available in <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Call/NGOs/WorldVisionInputs2.pdf>.
 UNICEF. (2021). The climate crisis is a child rights crisis. Introducing the children's risk index. Available in <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>.
 UNICEF. (2015). Children will bear the brunt of climate change. Available in <https://www.unicef.cn/en/press-releases/children-will-bear-brunt-climate-change-unicef>.