

BACKGROUND GUIDES



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2026

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Letter from the DIAS

Dear Delegates,

We are delighted to welcome you to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), at this year's edition of Wesgreen International School Model United Nations 2026 (WESMUN). We understand that some of you may be participating in a Model UN conference for the first time, and we wish you all the very best. We assure you that we will try our best to make this an amazing experience for everyone.

We recommend that all necessary research be done before the conference and that all of your content is organised so that you can form your responses efficiently. Remember, researching thoroughly and speaking confidently is truly the key to successful debate. As we assemble at the Wesgreen School, it is critical that we maintain an open and respectful discussion in order to build a sense of collaboration. The diversity of our origin and the differences in our viewpoints are an important asset in order to make difficult decisions on crucial issues which shape our world and people today.

Lastly, please be aware that this background guide only serves as a starter for information and some direction. Delegates are expected to carry out their own research about their country and its stance on the given agendas. We wish to see innovative ideas and original arguments. In the end, what matters most to us is the overall learning of delegates and that you leave an experience you remember. We look forward to seeing you all at the conference, and we wish you the very best with your research and preparations!

Please feel free to contact us for any questions you might have, we'd be more than happy to help. The past may be written, but the future rests in your hands. Good Luck!

Sincerely,
Dais of UNICEF,
Wasiq Nabeel, Zeina Islam & Ahmed Saad.

Introduction to committee

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is a specialised agency of the United Nations that was created to protect the rights of children around the world. It was first established in 1946, shortly after World War 2, as a temporary committee to provide emergency relief to children affected by the combat, but was later made permanent.

As of today, UNICEF operates and conducts missions in more than 190 countries. It is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which recognises children as equal beings with the same human rights as adults, regardless of a child's nationality, ethnicity, gender or economic status in society.

UNICEF's responsibilities include: providing clean water, sanitation, hygiene, education and nutrition to every vulnerable child. The committee functions by prioritising areas that require the most support, and works closely with local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and national governments to deliver sustainable programs.

However, the committee invests in more than just long-term projects, as it also provides life-saving aid (including both physical and psychological support) to growing children in conflicted areas.

Agenda 1:

Addressing how global challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, and pandemics affect children's health and well-being.

Introduction to the Agenda

The global challenges to children's health and well being have changed over the past several decades. Global inequities, armed conflict and violence, globalisation, nuclear proliferation, forced migration, and climate change are important child health issues that violate children's rights to optimal health and development. Advances in the life course sciences define how these issues affect the epidemiology and physiology of children's physical and mental health and development, and that of the adults they will become.

Patterns of discrimination and entrenched civil-political, social, economic, and cultural factors combine to affect child health and wellbeing in complex ways. The evolving science of syndemics contributes to the understanding of the influence of social and environmental factors on global child health and wellbeing. Coupled to the principles and practice of anthropology and human rights, syndemics reflects decades of accrued knowledge and experience of health professionals working at the intersection of health and human rights.

Children are going through a state of eco-anxiety; strong emotions such as sadness, anger, and grief are a response to what is happening to the world around us today. Moreover, it is as a result of feeling that those who have the power to prevent the worst from happening are often too quick to deny, minimize, and disregard such a fatal issue leaving the community feeling vulnerable. However, it is not just a feeling, recent studies indicate that, today 60% of young people are 'very' or 'extremely worried' about environmental problems, 50-67% said climate change makes them feel sad, scared, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless and guilty, 83% think adults have failed to take care of the planet, 75% believe that the future is frightening, 45% reported a negative impact of these emotions on daily functioning such as eating, concentrating, sleeping, going to school, and playing, and 64% think governments are not taking their concerns seriously, are not doing enough to avoid a climate catastrophe and are failing young people around the world.

Introduction to the Agenda

UNICEF launched a Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and Child Sensitive Data Platform which is a commitment made by countries that signed the UN framework convention on climate change Paris Agreement. This platform showcases findings from a UNICEF analysis of NDC submitted after September 2019; The platform data covers 47 indicators which provide context and/or determine the child-sensitivity of a sub-set of national climate plans and is then presented in the form of global dashboards, interactive maps, and country profiles. NDCs are reviewed and updated every five years. This allows governments to observe areas that could be more child sensitive in commitments and action to advocate for and track improvement by visualizing and having a track of global, regional and national progress towards the inclusion of children and youth in climate policy and action, and develop partnerships that increase the child sensitivity of climate commitments and action. This includes engaging with children and young people as stakeholders, rightsholders and agents of change, especially those from vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, initiated a Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan with three main objectives: PROTECT the lives, health and well-being of children and the resilience of their communities by adapting essential social services to a changing climate, more frequent disasters and a degrading environment, EMPOWER every child through their life course with the developmental opportunities, education and skills to be a champion for the environment, REDUCE the emissions and environmental footprint within UNICEF, support its global network of partners to do the same, and advocate for the fulfilment of ambitious international sustainability and climate change agreements.

Introduction to the Agenda

On top of that, UNICEF launched a UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan (UNSCAP) with eight main objectives:

1. Carbon emissions: Absolute and per capita reductions of 25% by 2025 and 45% by 2030.
2. Electricity consumption: Per capita reductions of 20% by 2025 and 35% by 2030.
3. Renewable energy: 40% by 2025 and 80% by 2030 of consumed electricity.
4. Commercial air travel: Per capita emissions reductions of 10% by 2025 and 15% by 2030.
5. Events: 100% of events (over 300 participants) meet established sustainability standards.
6. Climate neutrality: 100% of unavoidable carbon emissions are offset yearly from 2019 via certified carbon credits.
7. Operational efficiencies: demonstrated long term economic benefits from the Plan implementation.
8. Sustainable Development co-benefits: demonstrated increase in climate smart infrastructure and other sustainable development benefits to local communities from Plan implementation.

UNICEF took part in the Secretary General's Early Warning for All initiative, a US\$3.1 billion effort for every person on earth to be protected by early warning systems by 2027 initiated by World Meteorological Organization (WMO) with three urgent areas of actions:

1. Governments must embed early-warning systems across their policies, institutions and budgets through better coordination and alignment.
2. Financing. There must be a surge in financing and easing of debt burdens for developing countries, reform of global financial institutions and strengthening of multilateral development banks.
3. Climate Action. Countries must deliver bold new national climate action plans that align with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This includes embracing the potential of renewable energy.

Key Terms

Eco-anxiety: an emergent mental health problem due to extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC): the Paris Agreement requests each country to outline and communicate their post-2020 climate actions

World Meteorological Organization (WMO): a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for promoting international cooperation on atmospheric science, climatology, hydrology and geophysics

Water scarcity: the lack of available water resources to meet the demands of a specific population

Riverine flooding: happens when there is too much water, and the flow capacity of creeks or rivers (known as waterways) become overwhelmed and burst their banks, and flood areas which are not normally under water.

Flash floods: floods occurring rapidly within minutes or a few hours of a period of excessive rainfall or that are triggered by a sudden release of water caused by a dam failure or by debris.

Key Issues

Extreme temperature: Children adjust more slowly to changes in environmental temperature and are more vulnerable to heat-related health risks. During heatwaves, children under 12 months old are particularly vulnerable. Infants and small children are more likely to die or suffer from heatstroke because they are unable or lack agency to regulate their body temperature and control their surrounding environment. Exposure to abnormal or prolonged heat and humidity without relief or adequate fluids can cause various types of heat-related illnesses. It is also likely to cause children to miss school; for example, in South-East Asia exposure to higher-than-average temperatures during early years has been linked to children attending fewer years of schooling. In addition, warm environments (without proper ventilation) can make the classroom uncomfortable, leading to lower learning outcomes. Children and adolescents with chronic health conditions, such as respiratory conditions, may be even more susceptible to heat-related illnesses. They may be less likely to sense and respond to temperature changes, could be taking medications that can worsen the effects of extreme heat or be overweight and retain more body heat. Conditions like heart disease, mental illness and poor circulation are risk factors for heat-related illnesses. Other risk factors that can make children particularly vulnerable include whether they have access to adequate shelter, clothing and water. It is therefore critical to provide communities with education and resources to protect children from the effects of extreme heat. The health effects of heatwaves include heat rash as well as heat-related cramps, exhaustion and stroke. Dehydration can also occur as a result of extreme heat stress, which inhibits perspiration. In babies and young children, this is a prevalent cause of hyperthermia and mortality. Heat-related mortalities can also be increased by factors that cause excessive fluid loss.

Water scarcity: For children, water is simply life; the lack of it leads to Baseline water stress, which measures the ratio of total water withdrawals to available renewable surface and groundwater supplies, drought events, which is an estimate of global drought annual repartition based on the Standardized Precipitation Index –

where monthly precipitation is lower than 50 per cent of the median value during at least three consecutive months, interannual variability, which measures the average between-year variability of available water supply, including both renewable surface and groundwater supplies, seasonal variability, which measures the average within-year variability of available water supply, groundwater table decline, which measures the average decline of the groundwater table. Globally, water scarcity and droughts are becoming longer and more severe, and covering wider areas. Only about 2.5 per cent of the world's water resources consist of fresh water, of which around two-thirds is trapped in ice and glaciers, leaving very little for human consumption. Around 0.3 per cent of fresh water is in lakes and rivers. Approximately 144 million children worldwide under five are stunted. This affects both physical and cognitive development, which has implications for the rest of a child's life – including schooling, health and livelihood. This is because children require more water than food per unit of body weight than adults.

Key Issues

Riverine flooding: Lead to flash floods which are quick and onset to cause destruction, which means families and children have time to prepare and respond. Thus, mass damage is caused to schools and health centres, as well as triggering secondary hazards such as landslides. Withal, damage sanitation facilities or take place in areas of open defecation, contributing to water contamination and undermining the sustainability of sanitation behaviours. Leaching is also one of the direct aftermath of flooding from hazardous waste landfills and contamination from agricultural activities and septic tanks or pits. All this prevents children's access to education and healthcare, which compromises their protection, safety, and growth.

Coastal flooding: Caused by rising sea levels as well as storm surges and cyclones due to the increasing frequency and severity of severe weather associated with climate change. Between the years 1901 and 2010, global sea levels rose by 19 cm – an average of about 1.7 mm per year. In recent decades the rate of sea level rise has been increasing; between the years 2006 and 2015, sea levels rose 3.6 mm per year. The range of global average sea level rise is projected to be between 26 cm and 82 cm, depending on the level of emissions that are released into the atmosphere over the coming decades. This rise in sea level has caused coastal soil erosion which puts ports, homes, infrastructure, agricultural land and ecosystems at increased potential of exposure. Such risks are particularly critical in low-lying and densely populated coastal zones. On top of that, salination occurs due to the vertical and lateral intrusion of seawater via coastal aquifers; it affects both the quality and quantity of freshwater resources so water is unsafe to drink, threatening livelihoods, public health, agriculture, aquaculture, infrastructure and coastal ecosystems.

Cyclone exposure: Pose grave and immediate risks to children including serious injuries and death, the breakdown and destruction of essential services such as health, water and sanitation, and widespread population displacement. Likewise, they often result in extensive damage to infrastructure (roads, railways, bridges, power lines, communication and coastal protection), buildings (homes, schools and health clinics), agriculture, forestry and coastline erosion; this can affect economic development, social stability and the rule of law. Such impacts pose grave risks to children's well-being and development, with vulnerable children facing the most devastating impacts.

Key Issues

Disease vector exposure: Spread of diseases that predominantly kill children as changes in temperature, humidity, and precipitation patterns lead to vector-borne diseases, increase bite rate, and transmission. In 2019, there were an estimated 229 million malaria cases worldwide, with over 409,000 fatalities. Children under the age of five accounted for 67 per cent of global malaria deaths in 2019. Dengue fever is the most rapidly spreading mosquito-borne arboviral disease in the world. It is estimated that 3.9 billion people are potentially exposed to dengue and children are especially vulnerable. This leads to contamination of water supplies and influences the spread of other deadly diseases such as cholera and meningococcal meningitis and other food-borne diseases.

Air pollution: A large number of children live within polluted environments that exceed these thresholds many times over: 2 billion children live in areas where air pollution (PM_{2.5}), 1.7 billion children (three quarters of children globally) are currently highly exposed to air pollution that exceeds 15µg/m³, 1.3 billion children (nearly two thirds globally) are currently highly exposed to air pollution that exceeds 25µg/m³, 1 billion children (almost half of children globally) are currently highly exposed to air pollution that exceeds 35µg/m³. Air pollution can cause morbidity, and is linked with asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory infections and diseases, which can be debilitating, force children to miss school, and even cause long-lasting damage to their health and well-being. Some studies have shown that air pollution might affect cognitive development, as inhaled ultrafine particles are so small that they can enter the bloodstream and eventually lead to oxidative stress and neuroinflammation in the brain. Studies have shown that the lung capacity of children living in polluted environments can be reduced – similar to the effect of growing up in a home with secondhand cigarette smoke. Studies have also shown that adults who were exposed to chronic air pollution as children tend to have respiratory problems later in life.

Key Issues

Soil and water pollution: Toxic chemicals and heavy metals are threatening children's health and cognitive development, in addition to destroying ecosystems that are critical to a healthy environment. For example, lead poisoning due to contamination of soil, water, and air from some cosmetics, ayurvedic medicines, toys and other consumer products, and unsafe lead-acid battery recycling operations and open-air smelters, which are increasingly prevalent in many low- and middle-income countries. Exposure can also occur as a result of ingesting lead from peeling and cracking lead-based paint; eating food contaminated by lead due to lead-glazed pottery and lead in spices; drinking water from leaded pipes; and playing in lead-laced electronic waste dumps.

Inadequate education and learning: in simple words a child who lacks access to adequate education is more vulnerable to climate and environmental shocks and stresses. When confronted by climate shocks, educated children, families and communities are often more empowered and adaptive in their disaster preparedness, response and recovery. By contrast, in families with lower levels of education, children are more likely to be removed from school in order to work when disaster strikes. Alternately, educating and empowering children can also have transformative effects by expanding their adaptive capacity and reducing their vulnerability to climate change. It teaches children the skills necessary to manage risks whether they be climate, or economic or even conflict-related. It reduces children's vulnerability by improving prospects in the labor market when they are older, including access to a diversity of livelihood opportunities – reducing their dependence on single sectors, which could be hard-hit as a result of climate change.

Major Parties

High impact program countries: -

Bangladesh: Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate-related calamities like cyclones, flooding, and sea-level rise. This is mainly due to its low-lying geography and dense population. These environmental threats affect children in various ways. It increases displacement, limits access to safe water, and disrupts education and healthcare. As a major UNICEF program country, Bangladesh has worked in conjunction with UNICEF to implement climate-resilient water and sanitation systems (WASH). Alongside this, Bangladesh has implemented disaster risk transfer and insurance programs aimed at reducing both the long-term and short-term impacts of climate shocks on children and vulnerable communities.

India: India faces multiple climate-related challenges that directly impact children's health and wellbeing. Extreme heatwaves, flooding during monsoon seasons, and high levels of air pollution affect most of India's population. These challenges are exacerbated by high population density and the colossal difference in earning income. Children, particularly in urban slums and rural regions, experience disruptions to education, increased health risks, and limited access to healthcare services. India is a major focus of UNICEF's supported health, nutrition, and education programs. These programs aim to improve access to essential services and strengthen child resilience in climate-affected communities.

Afghanistan: Children in Afghanistan face extreme vulnerability due to a combination of climate change, prolonged conflict, and a fragile healthcare system. Child malnutrition is a substantial issue in Afghanistan as droughts and harsh winters worsen food security. Children scarcely get access to proper education and healthcare, especially in rural and displaced communities. Afghanistan remains a critical area for UNICEF's humanitarian programs. These programs focus on providing basic healthcare, nutrition support, and access to education for children.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): The Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to experience complex humanitarian challenges driven by climate shocks, disease outbreaks, and ongoing instability. The children of DRC have limited access to clean water due to frequent floods and food shortages. This also results in malnutrition. The spread of preventable diseases is also common in areas with weak sanitation systems. These conditions have made the DRC one of the largest recipients of UNICEF's assistance and aid. While supporting health, nutrition, and WASH programs UNICEF focuses on ensuring services remain accessible during climate-related disruptions.

Major Parties

South Sudan: South Sudan suffers from seasonal floods which often displace families, destroy crops, and contaminate water sources. Children are particularly affected by food insecurity, disease exposure, and interruptions to education. Limited infrastructure and access to healthcare further increase these risks. UNICEF works closely with partners in South Sudan to provide life-saving health, nutrition, and water and sanitation services.

Mozambique: Mozambique is frequently affected by tropical cyclones and flooding. These issues pose serious risks to children's safety, health, and access to education. Repeated climate shocks have caused widespread damage to infrastructure, especially affecting schools and healthcare facilities. In response, Mozambique has become a pilot country for innovative disaster risk transfer and insurance programs. Such programs are pioneered by UNICEF in collaboration with international partners. These initiatives aim to provide faster and more predictable funding following disasters. In the long-term, aiming to help protect children from the consequences of climate-related emergencies.

The Philippines: The Philippines is highly exposed to climate-related hazards such as cyclones, flooding, and storm surges. These climate hazards have repeatedly been a reason for disrupting education systems across the country. Children are often forced to miss school for extended periods due to damage to infrastructure and emergency displacement. This overall affects learning outcomes and overall mental health of students. As a result, the Philippines has become a key focus of UNICEF's work on climate resilience and education in emergencies. Through collaboration with the national government, UNICEF supports disaster preparedness and the protection of children during and after climate-related disasters.

Somalia: Somalia faces severe and prolonged climate challenges. Droughts have contributed to widespread food insecurity and child malnutrition. Limited state capacity and frangible infrastructure further increase children's vulnerability to climate shocks. In recent years, the Government of Somalia has partnered with UNICEF to advocate for greater international attention to the needs of children in climate-vulnerable contexts. Somalia has also called on global leaders to prioritize children. These calls to action have been effective in international forums such as COP29. Further, this highlights the importance of child-centered approaches to climate action.

Major Parties

Key Donor and Influential States:-

United States of America: The United States plays a substantial role in supporting UNICEF's global operations. It is the single largest government donor to UNICEF, contributing over US\$1.1 billion in 2024. These fundings are directed toward emergency response and disaster relief efforts. The United States strengthened UNICEF's capacity to respond to climate-related disasters, pandemics, and humanitarian emergencies that mainly affect children worldwide.

Germany: Germany is the second-largest government donor to UNICEF, contributing approximately US\$679 million in 2024. Germany plays a key role in supporting innovative approaches to climate risk management. This implies strengthening initiatives such as the Global Shield against climate risks. This financial support helps strengthen protection mechanisms for children in climate-vulnerable countries. Germany also plays a key role in supporting UNICEF's work in building resilience to climate-related shocks.

Japan: Japan is a major partner of UNICEF through the Japan Committee for UNICEF. In 2024, the Japan Committee was the largest single private-sector contributor to UNICEF's core resources. Japan provided approximately US\$145 million. This level of support reflects strong public and institutional commitment to child welfare. Japan's contributions allow UNICEF to maintain flexible funding for long-term programs in health, education, and emergency preparedness.

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom remains a significant public donor to UNICEF, contributing approximately US\$413 million in 2024. The UK prioritizes its funding towards humanitarian response globally. This support enables UNICEF to provide rapid assistance to children affected by climate-related crises and public health emergencies.

Republic of Korea: The Republic of Korea consistently ranks among UNICEF's top partners. In 2024, the Korean Committee for UNICEF had donated funding that amounted to approximately US\$142 million. The Republic of Korea's continued contributions reflect its commitment to improving child health, education, and wellbeing globally.

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI): In 2021, UNICEF launched the Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI). This is the first comprehensive global assessment of environmental risks from a child-centered perspective. The index measures children's exposure to climate hazards such as heatwaves, flooding, cyclones, and water scarcity. It also considers the children's access to essential services including healthcare, education, nutrition, and clean water. Findings from the CCRI revealed that approximately 1 billion children live in countries classified as extremely high risk. The CCRI has since been used to guide policy discussions in international forums.

Integration of Children into Climate Policy (Nationally Determined Contributions): UNICEF has actively supported governments incorporating

child-sensitive approaches into their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. UNICEF aims to ensure that adaptation strategies address the needs of younger generations. In addition, UNICEF supported the 2019 Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth, and Climate Action. This act formally recognizes children and youth as stakeholders in climate decision-making.

Health Response and Vaccine Equity: During global health crises, UNICEF plays a critical role in ensuring access to healthcare services for children. As the world's largest vaccine purchaser, UNICEF led the global delivery of COVID-19 vaccines. UNICEF led procurement and delivery, but worked with WHO, Gavi, COVAX to supply nearly 2 billion doses to 146 countries by the end of 2022. UNICEF worked tirelessly to maintain routine healthcare services that were disrupted by lockdowns. UNICEF to this day advocates to help prevent outbreaks of other life-threatening diseases among children.

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS):

Recognizing the psychological toll calamities have on children around the world, UNICEF has prioritized psychosocial support over the past few years. Through community-based programs, UNICEF aims to address many factors. These include stress, trauma, and anxiety caused by displacement, isolation, and loss. These efforts aim to support children's emotional wellbeing and strengthen long-term resilience.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH): UNICEF has consistently emphasized access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. These factors serve as a core strategy for protecting children's health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF expanded access to hygiene supplies and safe sanitation. These initiatives majorly were put into effect in schools, healthcare facilities, and vulnerable communities' pandemic affected regions. UNICEF envisions strengthening WASH services. This results in reducing the spread of infectious diseases and supports overall child health and wellbeing.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer:

How can UNICEF improve healthcare systems to make sure to provide constant access to essential child health services during emergencies like natural disasters and pandemics?

What measures can be implemented to protect child nutrition and food security when agriculture and humanitarian access are disrupted?

How can education systems/schools be made inclusive during emergencies?

How should governments address the mental health and psychosocial impacts of climate disasters and pandemics on children and adolescents?

What strategies can be used to ensure equitable vaccine access and disease prevention for children during global health emergencies?

How can we provide access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene to prevent disease outbreaks among children during crises?

How can international cooperation benefit low and middle-income countries in protecting children during crises?

What measures can be established to ensure that children's rights under the UNCRC are upheld during emergencies?

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