

Photo: Flickr Creative Commons License/Karin Desmarowitz/campact



YOUNG PEOPLE'S FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE: actions we can take for health and well-being

As young people, we are well positioned to build support for the health and well-being of this and future generations. Here we turn our attention to one of the biggest global threats to health and well-being: climate change. (1)

Why are we doing this? Members of PMNCH focus primarily on health, well-being and rights. They don't always consider how climate change affects people's lives and work. We want to change that. This knowledge summary is written *by* adolescents, youth, and youth-led organizations, *for* adolescents, youth and youth-led organizations. This knowledge summary shows how to increase the awareness, knowledge and capacity of adolescents, youth and youth-led organizations who have not yet engaged with the issue, within and beyond PMNCH, to act against climate change and its impacts on health and well-being.

We are also doing this because, despite the urgency for action, many decision-makers, from individual consumers to government leaders, are not doing enough to tackle climate change or its impacts on health and well-being. (2)

“Until we make a concerted effort across all sectors to co-create a space and to practice an inter-generational approach for the talents and skills of our young people, we risk perpetuating the same mistakes that got us into this mess.”

Joseph Sapat Moeono-Kolio
Young Samoan climate activist, 2018



Among our generation of 1.8 billion young people aged 10 to 24 years,ⁱ social and environmental awareness are growing. Many of us have first-hand experience of the impacts of climate change on our health and well-being. That is why adolescents and youth worldwide are taking action and making our voices heard. We are working in different ways to demand stronger political will and action from all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, citizens and industry. (3)

Many young people are eager to contribute towards climate and environmental issues. Just look at the millions of school-age students who have been marching for greater action from governments to fight climate change. (4) However, we don't all have the skills or the financial, political and technical resources to tackle the challenges and impacts of climate change. Oppressive social norms, such as age and gender inequality, also make it difficult for some of our voices to reach those in positions of power. For example, some communities expect adolescent girls to be submissive and not to speak out to those in authority. However, this can undermine adolescent girls' abilities to express their opinions and make decisions about their lives.

We need governments and industries to take the large-scale measures necessary to reduce land, water and air pollution, the overexploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation, including the depletion of resources such as air, water and soil, the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of wildlife. Young citizens as well as adults need to hold them accountable for these measures.

No matter where we live, we can all play our part for climate action, good health and well-being, whether it's through the personal choices we make in our households, the community initiatives we undertake, or by getting involved in policy and advocacy action. We might focus on different issues, such as waste management or land preservation. When multiplied by the 1.8 billion young people in the world, even small changes, such as turning off the tap when you brush your teeth and turning off lights when they are not in use, can produce a big impact. (5)



i. For the purposes of this document, "young people" includes adolescents, aged 10-19 years, and youth, aged 15-24 years. However, youth-led organizations may work with people up to age 30.

We have the right to make decisions about our own lives, health and well-being. This knowledge summary provides adolescents, youth and youth-led organizations with additional knowledge and capacity strengthening and suggests steps that can mobilize action around climate change, health and well-being, in ways that are helpful to us and to our families, communities and countries.

Why do we need to mobilize and act for climate, health and well-being?

Climate change is a global health and socioeconomic emergency

Our world today is already 1 °C warmer than it was in the pre-industrial era. (6) If global warming continues at the same rate, that increase is likely to reach 1.5 °C between 2030 and 2052. (6) Climate change is putting the health and well-being of billions of people at increased risk. (7) Extreme weather events, such as droughts and heatwaves, and their effects, such as rising sea levels and wildfires, directly affect health and can lead to physical injuries or heat-related deaths. Climate change also has indirect effects on health and well-being due to ecological changes, such as food and water insecurity and the spread of climate-sensitive infectious diseases, and by contributing to diseases spread by animals to humans, such as Ebola, avian influenza, Zika virus and now the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. (8, 9) Other social and economic impacts of climate change include forced migration and civil conflict, loss of homes and livelihoods and reduced access to essential services, such as education and health care. (10-12)



Climate change is bad for everyone, but it makes some people's lives worse

Climate change is likely to widen the existing health and socioeconomic differences between and within the world's richest and poorest populations. (7) Most greenhouse gases that cause climate change originate from wealthier industrialized countries. However, some of the worst health risks will affect small island developing states (13) and other coastal, mountainous, polar, tropical and desert regions. Countries with weak health systems and services will also be significantly affected. (14)

Along with the world's poor, it will be women, children, adolescents, youth and indigenous peoples who will suffer the worst effects of climate change if nothing is done, or if too little is accomplished too late. (15) For example, adolescent girls and young women are disproportionately affected by droughts due to their roles in household decision-making, and their tasks, such as water collection. (12) Climate-related disasters have also been shown to increase gender-based violence. (16)

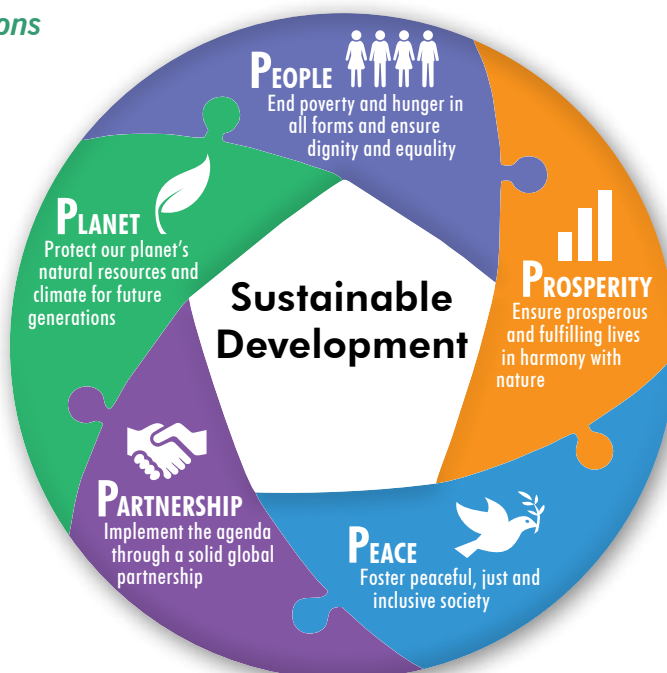
We have also seen that people living in places with poor air quality are more likely to suffer COVID-19 complications, and that poor air quality can increase the transmission of infections that cause flu-like illnesses. (17, 18)



Climate change threatens the lives of future generations

Climate change does not only affect the lives and health outcomes of people today. (19) Unless it is tackled, extreme climatic and environmental changes will also have dangerous consequences for our futures and those of our children. The basic essentials for good health and well-being, food, air and water, will all be heavily affected. (14) The world's population living in urban areas is also expected to increase from 55% to almost 70% in 2050. (20) However, we cannot ensure that cities will be fit to live in and environmentally friendly without addressing issues such as traffic congestion, poor housing and lack of basic services, including water supply, sanitation and waste management.

We have seen how government policies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 drastically changed patterns of transport and consumption around the world. This led to a 17% reduction in daily global CO₂ emissions by early April 2020 compared with average 2019 levels. (21) However, this reduction will be reversed unless governments, communities and individuals continue to take action, including by making policies and investments to reduce air pollution and reverse the climate emergency.



We must make the world a better place – for everyone, now – focusing on people, prosperity, peace, partnership and planetary health, while ensuring that the needs of future generations can also be met.

Adolescents and youth are finding new ways to stand together for change

The collective agency of adolescents and youths is recognized as one of the most significant resources for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including combating climate change and its impacts. It is our generation that will be most affected by the policies and decisions made today. (3) Although many of us are already taking leadership roles, we will also be the next generation of decision-makers and global leaders. Far from being passive victims, young people from all over the world are unanimously demanding that governments and other stakeholders, including industry, citizens and civil society, take action to address the climate emergency.

What can we do to mobilize and act against climate change?

In September 2019, the Global Youth Climate Action Declaration (22) called for urgent action to achieve the long-term goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement (23) through ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to efficiently reduce carbon emissions and reach the net zero target by 2050. (24) As young people we have a key role in mobilizing our governments and decision-makers to deliver on the NDC targets at the national level and to ensure accountability for climate action across all the SDGs.

Postponing action is no longer an option. The effects of climate change must be prevented and mitigated now, for the future benefit of everyone. Adaptation measures are also needed to protect communities from potential risks, such as using scarce water resources more efficiently and developing drought-tolerant crops. Others can also support us by providing the resources we need to take the most effective action possible.

PERSONAL ACTION

1. GET INFORMED AND BE WELL PREPARED FOR CLIMATE ACTION

We need evidence and competency to tackle the climate crisis and to contribute to a safer and more sustainable future. We also need the capacity, skills, autonomy and decision-making power to meaningfully engage in the climate agenda. These efforts must consider our evolving capacity and reach adolescents and youth most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. There are numerous ways that adolescents, youths and youth-led organizations can get informed.

“We need to start treating this climate change crisis like a crisis and step out of our comfort zone and take actions. I believe that people can change, we can change, and change is coming.”

Isaac Chu
Young Malaysian activist, 2020

Persuade teachers and administrators in schools, colleges, universities and other educational bodies to integrate climate change education into core curricula, focusing on:

- the science of climate change, its global and local impacts, including on health, climate mitigation and adaptation, co-benefits, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity;
- how different sectors', industries', corporations' and individuals' actions and lifestyles affect the climate;
- climate and environment policies and legal entitlements (and limitations under national laws and regulations), including the right to a safe, clean and healthy environment, as well as the reporting on these rights and entitlements; (25)
- scientific thinking and the skills and competencies to confidently navigate, analyse and question the validity of information and news on climate change; (26)
- dedicated programmes for teacher training on the topic.

Learn more about climate change through print media and trustworthy online platforms. For example:

- connect with other young people and organizations already active in the domain of climate change;
- look up information on climate change initiatives, projects, campaigns, educational tools, websites and publications, including those produced by and for adolescents and young people;
- promote and engage in courses about planetary health.

Build knowledge, skills and agency to engage in dialogue, advocacy and action on climate change issues that affect your own lives and communities.

For some communities, these issues may be waste management and water pollution, in others it may be rising sea levels and food insecurity. Opportunities to build capacity include:

- leadership and life skills training and mentoring;
- advocacy training;

- community-based support groups to facilitate learning, goal setting, confidence building and socializing;
- participation in formal platforms (e.g. roundtable discussions, symposiums and panels).

2. ADOPT LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO PROTECT THE CLIMATE, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO THE SAME

Adolescents, youth and youth-led organizations can take part in the global movement to address climate change, health and well-being. Change can start at home or school to shift towards more sustainable lifestyles and consumption habits.

Think about your environmental footprint and reduce your personal impact as far as possible.

- Long- and short-distance travel: use public transport, walk or ride a bike instead of going by car.
- Diet: buy food locally; eat less animal-sourced foods and more plant-based foods (e.g. fruits and vegetables); reduce food waste.
- Goods and services: buy less, from clothes to food to electronics and more; purchase well made, durable clothing and avoid fast fashion; refuse single-used plastics; collect and/or recycle garbage (see Box 1).
- Household energy: talk to your family about how to reduce energy use, e.g. by insulation; energy-efficiency appliances; switching devices off/unplugging power cables when not in use; recycling and composting.

Box 1. Personal action for waste management issues in Haiti

To reduce plastic waste, such as plates, cutlery and bottles, young people in Haiti developed edible cutlery made with three different recipes, using granola, sugar cookies and dough. They measured how long the cutlery lasted in liquid, such as hot milk. In this experiment, the granola cutlery stayed intact for longest (3 hours) while the dough spoon only remained intact for 1.5 hours, but the granola cutlery could not hold the milk without it leaking through. Such innovative alternatives can not only add a tasty complement to meals but can reduce a significant amount of plastic waste and simplify waste management.

For more information see: Forestal K. Solutions to waste management issues. Voices of Youth. 2020. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/solution-waste-management-issues>



USEFUL RESOURCES FOR PERSONAL ACTION

- UNESCO, United Nations Environment Programme. YouthXchange: Climate change and lifestyles guidebook. 2011. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000212876>
- WWF. Climate change resources for youth groups. 2020. <https://www.wwf.org.uk/get-involved/youth-groups/resources/climate-change-activities>
- UNICEF. U-Report. Climate change bot. <https://ureport.in/story/947/>
- UNICEF. Toolkit for young climate activists. <https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/toolkit-young-climate-activists>
- Climate Generation. Explore climate change resources. 2020. <https://www.climategen.org/climate-change-resources/>
- World's Largest Lesson. <https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/>
- European Footprints. What do you care about. Stories for a sustainable future. <https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/using-the-power-of-comics/>
- Planetary Health Alliance. Planetary health education. <https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/education>
- The EAT-Lancet Commission on Food Planet and Health. Can we feed a future population of 10 billion people a healthy diet within planetary boundaries? 2019. <https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/>
- World Health Organization. Did you know? ... By taking action on climate change you can improve your health. 2015. <https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/didyouknow-young-people.pdf?ua=1>
- Borunda A. How can city dwellers help with climate change? Buy less stuff. National Geographic. 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/06/cities-climate-impact-consume-less/>
- World Health Organization. Climate change. https://www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change#tab=tab_1

COMMUNITY LEVEL ACTION

3. SPREAD THE WORD: ADVOCATE FOR CLIMATE ACTION WITHIN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Younger and older generations must work together to tackle climate change for health and well-being. This is essential to enable more informed decision-making about sustainable lifestyles and consumption within our families and communities. Adolescents, youths and youth-led organizations must take leadership and mobilize action in our local communities.

Speak up: share the numbers, spread the science using the latest data. (27)

- Bring what you have learned about climate change, sustainable lifestyles and their impact on health and well-being into your conversations with friends, family, partners and decision-makers, among others. Share it on social media. It's up to everyone to spread accurate information.
- Create your own online networks and platforms to engage other young people, and draw on trustworthy sources of information, such as the World Health Organization and other United Nations organizations, who use reliably accurate data.

Challenge power relationships and political and other interests.

- Work within existing power structures to encourage change. This could be within your own household, classroom and community groups, or more broadly.
- Start a letter-writing campaign, meet with your head teacher, or make an appointment to discuss the issues with local leaders, such as your member of parliament or mayor.

“Do it! Don't be afraid. Whether it be talking about the environment or talking about mental health, we need more voices, especially those of young people. Using these social tools for good is something we all have the power to do – it's literally at our fingertips – and if we want to continue making the internet and the online world a safer, more positive space, then we need to start doing it now. You never know who you might inspire!”

Tolly Dolly Posh
Young climate activist and blogger, 2018

- Question what others claim as inevitable, such as a fossil fuel-based economy, hyper consumption, and increasing social inequality, and promote positive alternatives instead.
- Urge your government and industries to increase their positive actions for climate protection and to be open about the NDC process.

Be inspired by climate solutions developed by young people around the world to tackle climate change issues that affect you and your community:

- there are many ways to engage, ranging from personal action (see points 1 and 2 above), to community action, to advocating for policy change. For example:
- conduct awareness campaigns and deliver training sessions on climate, health and well-being issues that are relevant to your community, friends and colleagues;

Box 2. Action in communities for sustainable lives

The “Youth Leading Learning in Climate-Resilient Value Chains in the Pacific” project (YLLP) was launched in 2015 in the Cook Islands, Niue and the Marshall Islands to build young people's knowledge about climate-resilient agriculture practices. As well as building the technical capacity of young male and female farmers, the project uses social media and digital technologies to support the documentation and dissemination of best organic farming practices for enhancing climate-resilience, and the facilitation of digital marketing techniques to increase business opportunities. The YLLP network's digital platforms enabled young agricultural entrepreneurs to connect and to organize activities and generate new income streams. Examples of resulting activities include the establishment of an organic night market in Niue, and stronger linkages between the agriculture and tourism sectors in the Cook Islands.

For more information see: Food and Agriculture Organization. Youth in motion for climate action! A compilation of youth initiatives in agriculture to address the impacts of climate change. 2019.

<http://www.fao.org/3/ca5746en/ca5746en.pdf>

Box 3. Adolescent- and youth-led litigation for climate change in Colombia

Young people are using litigation to claim their right to demand that the state and society take action in response to the climate crisis. For example, with the support of Dejusticia, a Colombian research and advocacy organization, in 2018 a group of 25 young people came together to create the first lawsuit in Latin America on climate change and future generations. They asserted that indiscriminate deforestation was threatening their future lives and their constitutional rights to a healthy environment, health, food and water. In the lawsuit, the young people emphasized that future generations will be the ones to suffer the worst climate change effects. Therefore, they called on the government, not only to stop deforestation, but also to guarantee citizen participation in developing an intergenerational plan for the Colombian Amazon.

The Supreme Court of Justice upheld the young people's claim in a landmark ruling, ordering the protection of the Colombian Amazon from deforestation. The Court required the government to take concrete actions to protect the rights of future generations and of the Colombian Amazon, which was recognized as an "entity subject of rights".

Similarly, in 2020 young people from Portugal took crowdfunding legal action demanding 33 countries, including the European Union, the UK, Norway, Russia, Turkey, Switzerland and Ukraine, to make greater emissions cuts to safeguard their future physical and mental well-being. They are calling for governments to prevent discrimination against young people and protect their rights to exercise outdoors and live without anxiety. The case was initiated in 2017 after forest fires in Portugal killed over 120 people.

For more information see:

- Dejusticia. Colombian youth file the first climate change lawsuit in Latin America: What it is about? Video. 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6X1HRbS2g-Q>
- Dejusticia. Climate change and future generations lawsuit in Colombia: Key excerpts from the Supreme Court decision. 2018. <https://www.dejusticia.org/en/climate-change-and-future-generations-lawsuit-in-colombia-key-excerpts-from-the-supreme-courts-decision/>
- Watts J. Portuguese children sue 33 countries over climate change at European court. The Guardian. 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/sep/03/portuguese-children-sue-33-countries-over-climate-change-at-european-court>

- join environmental organizations and groups;
- participate in governmental, non-governmental, school and community programmes and projects against climate change, e.g. join school or community clean-up drives; participate in tree planting and go-green activities (see Box 2);
- hold sustainable and climate-friendly meetings to limit the environmental impact of any events, conferences or workshops you organize;
- urge policy change and support youth-led litigation (see Box 3);
- use print and social media to promote the issue of climate change and actions to tackle it.

4. LEARN MORE ABOUT DECISION-MAKING ON CLIMATE CHANGE, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, AND INSIST ON MEANINGFUL ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THOSE PROCESSES (LOCALLY, NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY)

Many adolescents and youths are unaware of their right to participate in decision-making and therefore unable to influence decisions affecting their health and well-being.



Photo: Flickr Creative Commons License/Plant-for-the-Planet

This reduces their ability to demand the services they are entitled to and their ability to get involved. However, no discussions about the future should take place without young people sitting at the table so that our voices and can be heard and acted upon. It is time for decision-makers to listen to, and use the power of, our diverse perspectives. There are many ways adolescents, youths and youth-led organizations can become involved in meaningful dialogue with decision-makers.

Know about the right to engage.

- International human rights agreements, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, explicitly set out adolescents' and young people's rights to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. This includes the right to a public forum to express our views, and support to achieve this (28).
- A range of international strategies and declarations also support adolescent and youth engagement, including the 2015 Paris Agreement, the Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action at the 25th Conference of the Parties (COP 25) (29) and others.
- When you reach voting age you have the right to vote to express your position and to hold elected government representatives to account.

Call on decision-makers to create opportunities for meaningful discussion of climate action, especially when none exist yet.

- Youth-led organizations and others can provide avenues for capacity building enabling adolescents and youth to engage effectively in policy processes and decision-making at all levels (see Box 3).
- Dialogue between adolescents, youths and decision-makers is needed so that young people's ideas are heard and properly considered.
- This includes the opportunity to provide input about policies relating to climate change, and to participate in key decision-making events, such as intergovernmental climate change negotiations.

“Regardless of the motivation to raise awareness about climate change, the voices of young people need to be considered because climate change affects our generation. Now, we are the ones who do not make the decision, but the most affected. Action against climate change is required now – every day that we postpone it gets us closer to hunger, wars and poverty.”

Aicha Mohamed
Young activist and volunteer with the Djibouti
Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2019



USEFUL RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY LEVEL ACTION

- Sustainable Development Solutions Network – Youth. Youth solutions report. 2019. <http://www.youthsolutions.report/2019report>
- United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change. Youth in action on climate change: inspirations from around the world. 2013. <https://www.unclearn.org/sites/default/files/inventory/unfccc287.pdf>
- Voices of youth. Take action on climate change. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/climate-action>
- Food and Agriculture Organization. Youth in motion for climate action! A compilation of youth initiatives in agriculture to address the impacts of climate change. 2019. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5746en/ca5746en.pdf>
- UNICEF. Engaged and heard! Guidelines on adolescent participation and civic engagement. 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/media/73296/file/ADAP-Guidelines-for-Participation.pdf>
- Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health. Knowledge Summary #37: Adolescent empowerment and engagement for health and well-being: strengthening capacities, opportunities and rights. 2020. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/333759/9789240005723-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health and Women Deliver. Advocating for change for adolescents! A practical toolkit for young people to advocate for improved adolescent health and well-being. 2018. https://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/advocacy_toolkit.pdf
- International Federation of Medical Students' Associations. IFMSA recommendations for sustainable and climate-friendly meetings. 2018. <https://ifmsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/IFMSA-Recommendations-for-Sustainable-and-Climate-friendly-Meetings.compressed.pdf>
- UNICEF. Mapping for adolescent and youth engagement in climate change. 2020. https://unicef-my.sharepoint.com/:x:/g/personal/tplush_unicef_org/EcbPTIIIIE6dCrjPWf7P5mPgBYaZJoQVxLBIACs6ADFQ?rt=IDT1z0rM2Eg



COLLECTIVE ACTION TO LINK THE LOCAL WITH THE GLOBAL

5. ACHIEVE MORE THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

Adolescent- and youth-led associations and movements, such as Fridays For Futures, Connect 4 Climate, and the International Youth Climate Movement, among others, are generating considerable momentum. (30-32) They are fostering forms of collaboration and communication that are essential for addressing global crises. They provide a platform for young people to engage in direct action and mass participation locally, nationally and globally. Below are some actions adolescents, youths and youth-led organizations can take.

Join a local, national and/or global movement:

together we can advocate for stronger political will and accountability for climate change, health and well-being. For example, we can call on governments to:

- declare an ecological and climate change emergency;
- adopt a comprehensive approach when considering and communicating the health impacts of climate change, including when setting NDC targets;
- reach the emission-cutting goals set by the legally binding Paris Agreement (21) and in country-specific NDCs (20) to combat global climate change;
- fulfil their commitments to support young people's engagement in climate change, e.g. in the COP 25 Intergovernmental Declaration (29) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (33) (see Box 4) and to report and monitor the NDC process transparently.

Photo: Flickr Creative Commons License/UNclimatechange



“I will not stop striking until the government communicates the harsh reality of our ecological crisis to the general public. Until it recognises that young people have the biggest stake in our future and will be affected the most.”

Umami Hoque
Young British activist, 2019

Box 4. Collective action at the global level: the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 25)

During an intergenerational dialogue at COP 25, five young climate activists and five ministers from Chile, Costa Rica, Fiji, Nigeria and Spain stressed the need for negotiations and commitments on climate change to include a focus on protecting children's and young people's rights. Over 350 children, authorities and global leaders attended the event, at which the Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action was launched.

The Declaration is based directly on inputs by young people from around the world. It commits signatory governments to accelerating inclusive, child-responsive climate policies. So far 13 countries have signed the declaration to accelerate inclusive, child- and youth-friendly climate policies and action at national and global levels, including the need to enhance their participation in decision-making.

For more information see: COP 25: Join the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/cop25-join-declaration-children-youth-and-climate-action>

Identify and engage in platforms to share good practices.

- Share learning about actions being taken on climate change, using United Nations and other reliable sources, through social media;
- Learn more about, and link to institutions and initiatives that support, the formal and institutional participation of young people in climate change processes. These institutions include PMNCH's Adolescent and Youth Constituency, the UN Major Group for Children and Youth, the Children and the Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UNDP's YouthConnekt, Action for Climate Empowerment and NDC partnerships, among others.

6. RECOGNIZE THAT MANY LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL STAKEHOLDERS HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Young people and our families and communities are not alone in our responsibility for tackling climate change. Governments have a duty to protect human rights and prevent harm being caused by climate change. They must also ensure that people affected by climate change, particularly those who are more vulnerable, are helped to improve their situation. Many partnerships, at national and international levels and across different sectors, are also required to act against the transnational crisis of climate change. Some examples of the relevant stakeholders and their roles are provided below.

Our efforts to push for climate change, health and well-being, as well as those of other stakeholders, should also be reflected at the heart of the COVID-19 response and recovery plans. We are advocating each stakeholder group to take specific actions, as outline below.

Governments at all levels: provide a structured environment to listen to and engage with adolescents and youths in decision-making and political processes; act in accordance with reliable and up-to-date scientific results to achieve the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement and other international agreements and commitments, including those relating to human rights; develop future-oriented policies for sustainable living and healthy cities; develop a market for renewable energy sources and energy efficiency; participate in the Health and Climate Change Global Survey and use data for decision-making (34); and work effectively with the United Nations and global partners to address the climate change crisis.

United Nations: support young people by building their capacity on climate change issues and advocacy; amplify young people's voices in national and global forums; provide a platform for dialogue between young people and decision-makers; and hold decision-makers accountable to young people.

Health and environmental academics: research, publish and build the evidence base on climate change and young people's health and well-being; demonstrate the human costs and benefits of NDCs and climate policies that address the impacts of climate change on young people's health and well-being; educate all stakeholders on the links between climate change and young people's health and well-being, including future health professionals, and advocate for it to be incorporated into their training curricula; and advocate in support of adolescent and young climate activists.

“I also have a dream: that governments, political parties and corporations grasp the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis and come together despite their differences – as you would in an emergency – and take the measures required to safeguard the conditions for a dignified life for everybody on earth.”

Greta Thunberg
Young Swedish environmental activist, 2019



Photo: Flickr Creative Commons License/Andy Bosselman, Streetsblog Denver



USEFUL RESOURCES FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Industry and infrastructure actors: develop sustainable and healthy cities, taking into consideration issues including transport and green spaces; promote low-tech solutions and sustainable technology that is long-lived and can be repurposed; implement solid waste management; reduce industrial emissions; insist that pricing reflects the true costs to society of products, technologies and policies; and demand that the positive and negative health consequences of policy actions are comprehensively evaluated, together with their financial and environmental implications (e.g. new development projects, new airports). (35)

Schools and educational institutions: invest in climate-smart schools (36) and provide climate change and environmental education; build teacher capacities in climate-smart education; provide adolescents and young people with the understanding, skills and attitudes to help shape low-emission and climate-resilient societies; develop innovative alternative forms of education to ensure continuing access to high-quality education despite climate impacts; and limit investment in fossil fuel companies and reinvest in socially responsible and environmentally sustainable alternatives.

- Global Climate Strike. <https://globalclimatestrike.net/>
- Fridays for Future. <https://fridaysforfuture.org/>
- Connect 4 Climate. Connecting to take on climate change 2020. <https://www.connect4climate.org/>
- YouthConnekt. <http://youthconnekt.rw/>
- International Youth Climate Movement. <https://www.facebook.com/youthclimate.org/>
- UNICEF. Youth for climate action. <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/youth-action>
- Fedder A. How youth around the world are leading the call for Climate Action. 2019. <https://sumas.ch/how-youth-around-the-world-are-leading-the-call-for-climate-action/>
- Global consensus statement: meaningful adolescent and youth engagement [press release]. Geneva: Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health; 2018. <https://www.who.int/pmnch/mye-statement.pdf>
- United Nations. Global Youth Climate Action Declaration. 2019. <https://www.unmgy.org/global-youth-climate-action-declaration-preamble>
- United Nations Climate Change. Action for Climate Empowerment Finds Strong Support at COP25. 2020. <https://unfccc.int/news/action-for-climate-empowerment-finds-strong-support-at-cop25>
- Stott R, Smith R, Williams R, Godlee F. Schoolchildren's activism is a lesson for health professionals. BMJ. 2019;365:l1938. <https://www.bmj.com/content/365/bmj.l1938>
- World Health Organization. WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19. 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-manifesto-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19>

References

1. World Health Organization. WHO calls for urgent action to protect health from climate change – Sign the call. 2015. <https://www.who.int/globalchange/global-campaign/cop21/en/>
2. Frischmann C. The young minds solving climate change. BBC. 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190327-the-young-minds-solving-climate-change>
3. O'Brien K, Selboe E, Hayward B. Exploring youth activism on climate change: Dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent. Ecology and Society 2018;23(3):42.
4. Global Climate Strike. 2020. <https://globalclimatestrike.net/>
5. Dantas T. Role of Young People in the Fight Against Climate Change. 2018. <https://medium.com/@thalesetd/the-role-of-young-people-in-the-fight-against-climate-change-aad0d06b496>
6. IPCC. Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. Headline Statements from the Summary for Policymakers. 2019. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Hheadline-statements.pdf
7. Costello A, Abbas M, Allen A, Ball S, Bell S, Bellamy R, et al. Managing the health effects of climate change: Lancet and University College London Institute for Global Health Commission. Lancet. 2009;373(9676):1693-733.
8. United Nations Environment Programme. Coronaviruses: are they here to stay? 2020. <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/coronaviruses-are-they-here-stay>
9. World Health Organization. One Health. 2017. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/one-health>
10. World Health Organization. WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change: the transformation needed to improve lives and well-being sustainably through healthy environments. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020. <https://www.who.int/phe/publications/global-strategy/en/>
11. World Health Organization. 71st World Health Assembly. A71/10. Health, environment and climate change; 2018. https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA71/A71_10-en.pdf?ua=1
12. World Health Organization. COP24 special report: health and climate change. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. <https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/COP24-report-health-climate-change/en/>
13. World Health Organization. 72nd World Health Assembly. A72/16. Health, environment and climate change. Draft plan of action on climate change and health in small island developing States. 2019. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/climate-change/who-global-strategy-on-health-environment-and-climate-change-in-sids-a72-16.pdf?sfvrsn=3883a519_2
14. World Health Organization. Did you know?...By taking action on climate change you can improve your health. 2015. <https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/didyouknow-health-professionals.pdf?ua=1>
15. World Health Organization. Protecting health from climate change: connecting science, policy and people. 2009. <https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/reports/9789241598880/en/>
16. Epstein A, Bendavid E, Nash D, Charlebois ED, Weiser SD. Drought and intimate partner violence towards women in 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa during 2011-2018: A population-based study. PLoS Med. 2020;17(3):e1003064
17. Tang S, Yan Q, Shi W, Wang X, Sun X, Yu P, et al. Measuring the impact of air pollution on respiratory infection risk in China. Environ Pollut. 2018;232:477-86.
18. Wu X, Nethery RC, Sabath BM, Braun D, Dominici F. Exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States: A nationwide cross-sectional study. medRxiv. 2020
19. Watts N, Amann M, Arnell N, Ayeb-Karlsson S, Belesova K, Boykoff M, et al. The 2019 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate. Lancet. 2019;394(10211):1836-78.

20. European Commission. Knowledge for Policy. Worldwide Population Growth. 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/foresight/topic/continuing-urbanisation/worldwide-urban-population-growth_en
21. Le Quéré C, Jackson R, Jones M, Smith A, Abernethy S, Andrew R, et al. Temporary reduction in daily global CO₂ emissions during the COVID-19 forced confinement. *Nature Climate Change*. 2020;10:647-53.
22. United Nations. Global Youth Climate Action Declaration. 2019. <https://www.unmgy.org/global-youth-climate-action-declaration-preamble>
23. United Nations Climate Change. The Paris Agreement. 2015. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>
24. United Nations Climate Change. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). 2020. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>
25. Children's Environmental Rights Initiative. Children's Rights and the Environment. Guidance On Reporting To The Committee On The Rights Of The Child. 2020. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dca1afe13943a33f7cc7570/t/5f3117d7be6db12b5f0689da/1597052900756/Guidance_On_Reporting_To_The_Committee_On_The_Rights_Of_The_Child-FINAL.pdf
26. National Literacy Trust. Fake news and critical literacy. The final report of the Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy in Schools. London: National Literacy Trust. 2018. https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Fake_news_and_critical_literacy_-_final_report.pdf
27. World Health Organization. Health and Climate Change Country Profiles. 2019. <https://www.who.int/activities/monitoring-science-and-evidence-on-climate-change-and-health/health-and-climate-country-profiles/>
28. UN General Assembly. Convention on the Rights of the Child. 20 November 1989. United Nations, Treaty Series. 1577:3. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html44>
29. Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action. 2019. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/cop25-join-declaration-children-youth-and-climate-action>
30. Fridays for Future. <https://fridaysforfuture.org/>
31. Connect 4 Climate. Connecting to take on climate change. <https://www.connect4climate.org/>
32. International Youth Climate Movement. <https://youthclimatemovement.wordpress.com/>
33. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. 1992. <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>
34. World Health Organization. Health and Climate Change Survey Report: Tracking Global Progress. 2019. <https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/country-profiles-global-report-2019/en/>
35. World Health Organization. A global assessment of exposure and burden of disease: FAQs. 2020. <https://www.who.int/phe/health-topics/outdoorair/global-exposure-assessment-faq/en/>
36. UNICEF. Education systems: A Victim and a Key to the Climate Crisis. 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/eap/stories/education-systems-victim-and-key-climate-crisis>

Sources of infographics

- Climate change threatens your health. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/protecting-the-islanders-from-climate-change-and-environmental-hazards>
- Who is at risk of climate change? World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/protecting-the-islanders-from-climate-change-and-environmental-hazards>
- Sustainable Development. The Five Ps. United Nations. <https://www.slideshare.net/mes0/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-70859274>

Source of quotations

- Joseph Sapati Moeono-Kolio. Quotation in: Pacific young leaders on the forefront of climate action. The Commonwealth. 2019. <https://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/pacific-young-leaders-forefront-climate-action>
- Isaac Chu. The Climate Is Changing Because We Aren't. Voices of youth. 2020. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/climate-changing-because-we-arent>
- Tolly Dolly Posh. Quotation in: Tolly Dolly Posh: fashion + sustainability. Voices of youth. 2018. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/tolly-dolly-posh-fashion-sustainability>
- Aicha Mohamed. Youth as Gamechangers in the fight against Climate Change. Voices of Youth. 2019. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/youth-gamechangers-fight-against-climate-change>
- Umami Hoque. Youth climate strikes: why I'll keep striking and when I'll stop. Friends of the Earth 2019. <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/youth-climate-strikes>
- Greta Thunberg. I have a dream that the powerful take the climate crisis seriously. The time for their fairytales is over. The Independent. 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/greta-thunberg-congress-speech-climate-change-crisis-dream-a9112151.html>

Acknowledgements

Scientific writer: Rachael Hinton, RHEdit. **Editor:** Joanne McManus. **Technical contributions (in alphabetical order):** Valentina Baltag, World Health Organization; Omnia El Omrani, The International Federation of Medical Students' Association (IFMSA); Mona Ibrahim, UK Research and Innovation, Global Challenges Research Fund Accelerate Hub; David Imbago-Jácome, International Youth Health Organization (YHO); Meghan Victoria Kerr, IMFS; Joanna Lai, UNICEF; Poorvaprabha Patil, UN Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY); Pierre Quiblier, UN Environment Programme (UNEP); Meghna Ranganathan, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); Marleen Temmerman, Aga Khan University; Andrej Martin Vujkovic, International Youth Health Organization (YHO); Amy Wickham, UNICEF; Chun-Yueng Wong, GAVI; Maria Cristina Zucca, UNEP. **Coordinated by:** Anshu Mohan and Meheret (Mimi) Melles-Brewer (PMNCH). **Design:** Annovi Design.

PMNCH Knowledge Summaries synthesize recent evidence into a clear, concise and user-friendly format to support advocacy, policy and practice on issues related to sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and well-being. Each Knowledge Summary is targeted at policy-makers, champions and PMNCH constituencies. PMNCH works actively with partners from different organizations and constituencies, not only to develop the series, but also to ensure that the summaries reach key stakeholders.

Available on-line at

<http://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/summaries/en/>



Women's, children's and adolescents' health: knowledge summary

ISBN 978-92-4-002316-1 (electronic version)

ISBN 978-92-4-002317-8 (print version)

© World Health Organization 2021.

Some rights reserved. This work is available under the CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence.

ISBN 978-92-4-002316-1

9789240023161



9 789240 023161