



unicef   
for every child

# The UNICEF Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan

For Every Child, A Liveable Planet

2023 – 2030



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# Abbreviations

<b>CCA</b>	Climate change adaptation
<b>CCRI</b>	Children's Climate Risk Index
<b>CDP</b>	Carbon Disclosure Project
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster risk reduction
<b>ECD</b>	Early childhood development
<b>ESS</b>	Environmental and social safeguards
<b>EW4All</b>	Early Warnings for All
<b>EWS</b>	Early warning system
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse gas
<b>GTT</b>	Global Technical Team
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental health and psychosocial support
<b>NAP</b>	National adaptation plan
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions
<b>RUTF</b>	Ready-to-use therapeutic food
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>STEM</b>	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene

# Glossary

## **Anticipatory action**

Anticipatory action refers to actions taken to reduce the impacts of a forecast hazard before it occurs, or before its most acute impacts are felt. The actions are carried out in anticipation of a hazard's predicted impacts and based on a forecast of when, where and how the event will unfold.<sup>1</sup>

## **Climate change**

Climate change refers to a change in the state of the climate that can be identified (for example, by using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be caused by natural internal processes or external forcings such as modulations of the solar cycles, volcanic eruptions and persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use.<sup>2</sup>

## **Disaster**

Disaster refers to a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts.<sup>3</sup>

## **Disaster risk**

Disaster risk refers to the potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets which could occur to a system, society or a community in a specific period of time, determined probabilistically as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity.<sup>4</sup>

## **Hazard**

Hazard refers to a process, phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.<sup>5</sup>

## **Resilience**

Resilience is the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.<sup>6</sup>

## **Sustainability and climate action**

Sustainability and climate action in this document encompasses all efforts to minimize environmental impacts, mitigate and promote adaptation to climate change, and enhance resilience to environmental and disaster risks, within the overarching goal of safeguarding the well-being and rights of all children and young people.

# Summary

Every child on Earth is already affected by a planetary crisis of climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss.\* One billion children are already at particularly high risk.<sup>7</sup> The only long-term solution is to drastically reduce emissions while also ensuring that environmental sustainability translates to economic opportunity. However, the effects of the crisis are here now, will worsen in the coming decades and are felt most keenly by those who contribute least to the crisis. While solutions to these effects exist, they receive insufficient global attention.

A clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right in itself. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child affirmed the obligations of government signatories to safeguard this right for children through the General Comment No. 26 (2023) on Children's Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change.

As part of a child rights-based approach and growing international consensus that protecting the planet is critical, UNICEF recognizes that it must transform how it works – both from within and with partners – **delivering the best results cannot be achieved by UNICEF working alone.**

The Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan (henceforth “Action Plan”) outlines UNICEF’s organizational response to put children at the centre of the response to this crisis, as well as focus areas for action and partnership. The Action Plan also reflects an ongoing commitment to fulfil the promise of multilateral agreements aiming to protect the planet and the rights of children to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

The document provides an overall umbrella framework for more detailed UNICEF sub-strategies, plans and guidance. The aims of this document are to:

**Set out three main objectives on which UNICEF will focus**, based on the needs of children and our collaborative advantage as an organization. These objectives are:

- ↳ 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.

**Present how UNICEF will implement these objectives – our ‘drivers of implementation.’** The drivers are classified as:

- ↳ *Foundational elements:* Rapidly enhance the capacity of all UNICEF offices to engage efficiently in implementing the key objectives and be ready to engage in larger-scale programming and advocacy. These will be implemented in every UNICEF country office by 2025.
- ↳ *Mainstreaming:* Systematically embed sustainability and climate action as a core focus within our strategies, programmes, advocacy, operations and supply chain. UNICEF will have a cohort of 50 countries that demonstrate this integrated delivery by 2025.
- ↳ *Focused areas of acceleration:* A small number of focused initiatives that span across our key objectives and have the potential to achieve rapid results for children globally. This document describes an initial set of accelerators that will be periodically updated, with targets that will be finalized in consultation with partners.

**The Action Plan is a living document** that lays out our initial measures for progress by 2025, and it will be periodically updated in concert with updates to UNICEF’s Strategic Plan as part of the Mid-Term Review through to 2030, in addition to consultations with partners.

\* The three major interrelated problems that humanity is currently facing are climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. These three problems are together referred to as the ‘triple planetary crisis’, henceforth ‘planetary crisis’ in this document. See <https://unfccc.int/blog/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis>.



© UNICEF/UN0750068/Asad Zaidi  
In late 2022, Gulnaz (7) shows her drawing to other students at a temporary learning centre established by UNICEF for flood-affected children in Pakistan.

## The defining challenge of our generation

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified in 1989, recognizes that a nation's prosperity is ultimately determined by how it fulfils its obligation to protect its children. There is now growing understanding that the world cannot fulfil its promise to its children without confronting the planetary crisis.

The crisis has already exposed nearly every child on every continent to climate and environmental hazards. One billion children – nearly half of the world's 2.4 billion children – live in countries at extremely high risk as determined by UNICEF's groundbreaking Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> In these high-risk countries, the CCRI notes that children face a vicious cycle of increasing exposures and vulnerabilities that greatly compromise their ability to survive, grow and thrive.

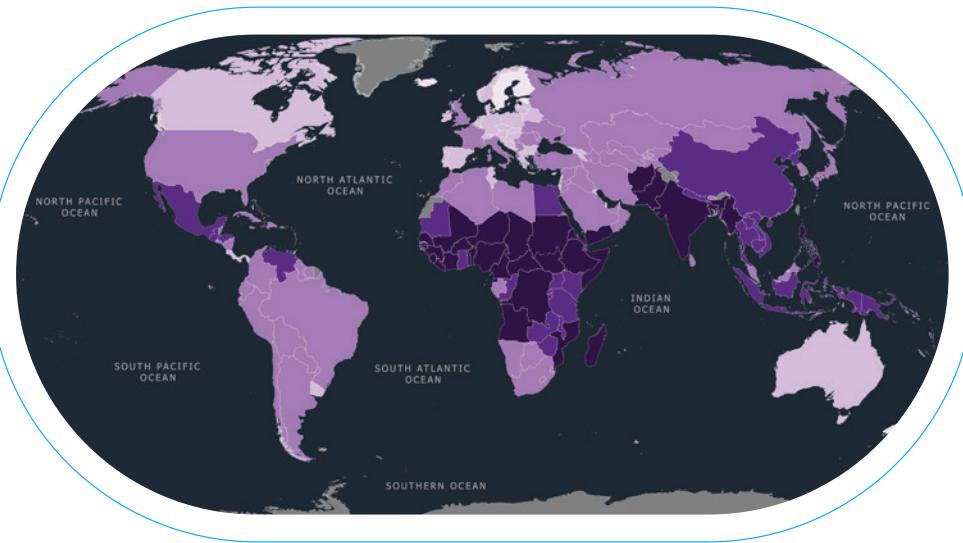
This global emergency threatens decades of development and humanitarian gains. Today, more than three-quarters of United Nations humanitarian appeals involve an extreme weather event, up from just over one-third in 2000.<sup>9</sup> These mounting challenges – combined with existing economic crises, armed conflicts and the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world – increase the imperative to act now.

Figure 1  
The climate risks children face\*



**1 billion children**  
live in extremely high-risk countries

**99% of all children**  
exposed to at least one major climate  
and environmental hazard, shock or stress



● Extremely High   ● High   ● Medium-High   ● Low-Medium   ● Low   ● No data



#### **2 billion children**

– almost 90 per cent of children globally –  
are exposed to high levels of air pollution



#### **240 million children**

face a high threat of coastal flooding



#### **820 million children**

face high exposure to heatwaves



#### **920 million children**

suffer from water scarcity



#### **400 million children**

are living in high-risk cyclone prone areas



#### **600 million children**

are at high risk of exposure to vector-borne diseases

\* United Nations Children's Fund, *The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index*, UNICEF, New York, 2021. The designations and maps used do not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or of its authorities, or the delimitation of any frontiers.

**Children are uniquely vulnerable** and at a significantly higher risk of harm than adults. They eat and drink more and breathe more air per unit of body weight than adults. They are more likely than adults to be affected by malnutrition and succumb to illnesses that climate change may worsen, such as cholera, malaria and allergic respiratory diseases. Children are at greater risk than adults from the respiratory, neurological and other diseases

caused by air pollution, whether from the use of solid fuels for cooking or heating within their homes or emissions from agriculture, transport or industry within the ambient air. Any deprivation due to environmental degradation or climate change during children's formative years can result in irreparable harm that affects their entire lives. Moreover, children are uniquely vulnerable to the disruption and trauma caused by climate-related displacement.

### **Children face the greatest consequences of inaction.**

The most vulnerable children – those living in poverty, the youngest (under five years of age), the displaced and children living with disabilities – often lack access to essential services like health care, water and education, making them even more susceptible to the daily negative effects of climate change and environmental hazards. Climate-related effects, biodiversity loss and displacement also exacerbate existing gender inequalities, leaving young women and adolescent girls with greater caretaking responsibilities at home. The increased burdens put them at risk of dropping out of school, in turn negating their access to school-based health, nutrition and social protection programmes.<sup>10</sup> Climate stresses and shocks can push households to adopt other negative coping mechanisms, leading to an increase in protection issues for children including child marriage, child labour and family separation. Climate-related crises also increase gender-based violence. For all these children, mitigation efforts will come too late as most of the global warming they will experience between now and 2050 is due to emissions that have already been released.

### **We need urgent action to address the global gap in efforts to protect all children, and especially those who are the most vulnerable.**

The countries which are most vulnerable to the planetary crisis lack critical support. For example, only a small proportion of global climate funds are allocated to meet their urgent needs.<sup>11</sup> This impedes their ability to build resilience and adapt. An even smaller share of this inadequate funding is targeted at adapting the social sectors that children in these countries depend on most in crisis, and which are critical for climate change adaptation solutions.

Despite the disproportionate impact of the planetary crisis on children, they have so far been virtually invisible in relevant policy debates – and in global commitments and investments. The deeply inequitable effects of the planetary crisis are exacerbated by a failure to put the needs of children at the centre of the response. This is evidenced by the fact that only 2.4 per cent of key multilateral climate funds serving the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Paris Agreement can be classified as supporting child-responsive programmes.<sup>12</sup>

**Vulnerable children face formidable challenges. And the solutions require more than any one individual, organization, government or business can provide. They require unprecedented global partnerships that leverage the unique strengths of each actor to achieve a level of impact that no one could achieve alone.**

Children cannot wait for change. They deserve to be supported by a global movement focused on confronting the worst effects of the planetary crisis and that ensure that society's most vulnerable victims – its children – are at the centre of the response.

### **We know from our work that solutions exist that can dramatically improve the lives of children.**

Concerted action on climate change would reduce the number of people requiring emergency humanitarian assistance by 90 per cent by 2050.<sup>13</sup> Our development and humanitarian programmes offer clear examples of the programmes that safeguard child survival and well-being – interventions such as early warning systems (EWSs) for heatwaves or cyclones, solar-powered water systems in areas facing water insecurity, and sustainable energy solutions that reduce emissions while improving health outcomes and increasing uninterrupted access to schools.<sup>14</sup>

### **UNICEF's mandate demands immediate and decisive action as the protector of future generations.**

UNICEF is recognized around the world for its success in meeting the most urgent needs of vulnerable children. In times of crisis, UNICEF has been among the first on the front lines, working closely with partners to overcome some of society's most daunting challenges.

We need look no further than the COVID-19 pandemic – the largest public health and economic crisis of this generation – where UNICEF was on the frontlines of the world-wide response to vaccinate 2 billion children and adults in developing countries.<sup>15</sup> The partnerships that came together with unprecedented speed and urgency included United Nations agencies, governments and ministries, local and international civil society groups, and global private sector companies.

Today, the planetary crisis presents us with a challenge that calls for a similarly transformational and enduring response. And that is why UNICEF is doing more as an organization and as a protector of future generations – working with others to galvanize a global commitment to a sustainable world and to protect the most vulnerable children from the effects of a changing climate and degrading environment.

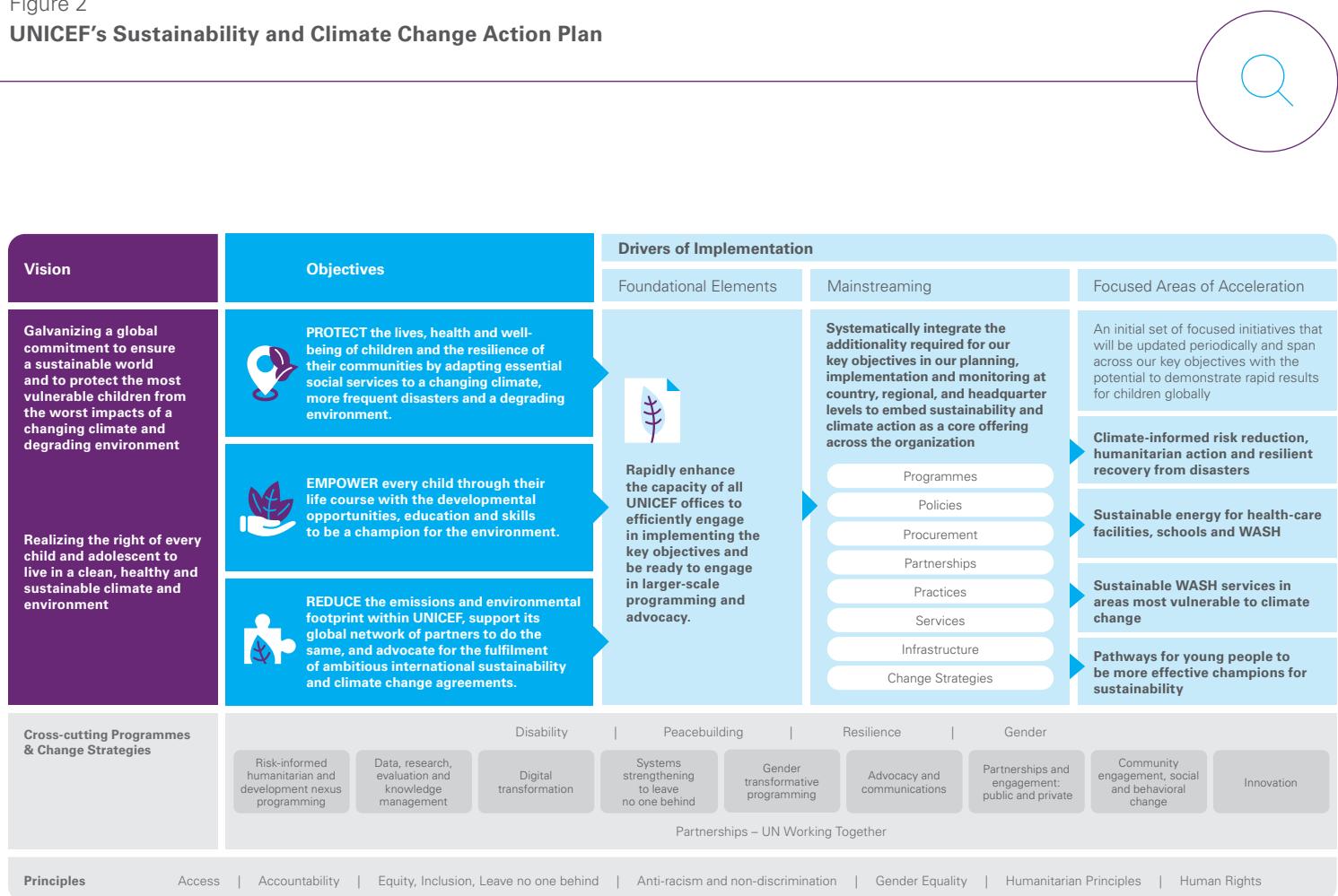
# The Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan Framework

UNICEF's Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan provides a comprehensive blueprint to achieve our ambitious vision by 2030 (Figure 2).

The plan reflects extensive consultations with UNICEF staff, as well as young people and partner organizations, to seek early inputs on its focus and direction.

The ambitious commitments build on our current contributions, propose a rapid expansion of existing initiatives with great promise, and call for the exploration of new programmes that meet the unmet needs of children.

Figure 2  
**UNICEF's Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan**



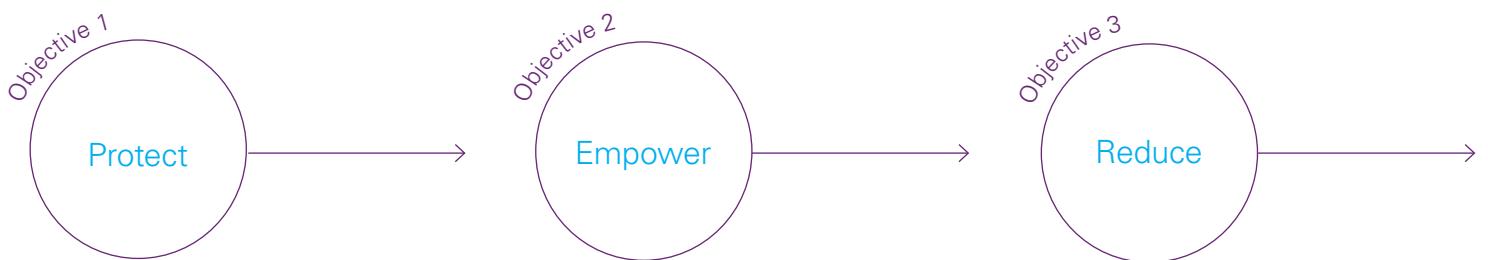


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In 2022, all around Egypt, members of 'environment and climate' clubs (an initiative led by the Egypt Ministry of Youth and Sports) welcomed the EGYOUTH4CLIMATE Caravan on its way to COP27. UNICEF was one of the caravan supporters.

## Our three objectives

This action plan is founded on the principle that sustainability and climate action should be integrated into UNICEF's and its partners' mandates, aiming to achieve its three key 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.

Building on the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022-2025,<sup>16</sup> the Action Plan recognizes that child-sensitive climate action that engages young people must be gender-transformative and include proactive measures to engage and support girls, boys and children of diverse gender identity.

**UNICEF's ambition is to enable every child to live in a safe and sustainable environment**, with a focus on the 1 billion children most at risk.

## Objective 1

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.

### The opportunity

The planetary crisis poses significant challenges to the social services that children depend on most to survive and thrive, such as health; nutrition; education; child protection; social protection; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Damage to or closure of physical infrastructure because of extreme weather events such as floods, wildfires and cyclones disrupts schooling. Air pollution, rising temperatures and changing disease patterns

increase pressures on health and food systems and risks for children. Changing rainfall patterns, biodiversity loss, and more frequent heatwaves and droughts mean that children, particularly girls, spend more time fetching water and are more likely to grow up malnourished and miss out on education. The resulting displacement that can occur further impacts access to services and exacerbates protection risks for children.



Interventions that improve the resilience of these social services to climate and environmental shocks are among the best ways to reduce the risk that children face, particularly in communities that have contributed the least to global emissions and pollution. UNICEF research indicates that:



Investments that improve access to **climate-resilient WASH** services can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **415 million children**.



Investments that improve **educational outcomes** can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **275 million children**.



Investments that improve access to **health and nutrition** services can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **460 million children**.



Investments that improve access to **social protection** and reduce **poverty** can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **310 million children**.<sup>17</sup>



Investments in climate-resilient interventions can hinder a documented 1 per cent increase in **child marriage** for every 10 per cent rainfall change due to climate change.<sup>18</sup>

### The pathways to progress

UNICEF will actively work to facilitate and prioritize action on three critical, yet practical, solutions as part of a collaborative global effort to adapt the social services that children depend on for their survival and well-being:

- i **Develop low-pollution and accessible infrastructure and services** such as schools, water facilities and nutrition delivery systems that can withstand shocks.

ii

**Train community members and service delivery professionals** by giving them the knowledge and skills to respond to threats, including showing them how to use data that identifies areas where disasters will cause most damage.\*

\* Examples of this work include training health workers to diagnose and treat heat stress and pollution-related illnesses, training on brief, scalable psychological interventions that can be delivered by staff not specialized in mental health and psychosocial support after brief training and with supportive clinical supervision aimed at effectively addressing 'mild and moderate mental health conditions', working with local communities to conduct hazard mapping, and training specialists to identify sector-specific post-disaster needs.

- iii Embed child-sensitive solutions into government systems** – policies, budget allocations and a financing architecture that prioritize children’s most urgent needs, with the financial means to implement these measures.

UNICEF’s presence in communities, relationships with the authorities responsible for social services, ability to respond to both disasters and longer-term threats, and international reach as part of the United Nations family enable us to work across infrastructure implementation, service delivery, capacity building and system strengthening, including policies, budgeting, finance, and monitoring and evaluation. These solutions build on existing work: in 2022, UNICEF supported programmes in 69 countries in sustainability and climate change across all regions.

These interventions must be implemented in ways that ensure programmes:

- ↳ Encompass both emergency humanitarian responses and long-term resilience building in ways that coordinate action, policy and financing.

- ↳ Promote collaboration across local, regional and national levels, and also ensure that intergovernmental interventions focus on global actions that benefit the most vulnerable children.
- ↳ Support governments in every region of the world to adapt social services that children rely on – such as health, education, WASH, child protection, and social protection systems – to make them resilient with a focus on policymaking, financing and implementation. This includes supporting children and families through flexible social services, including mental health and psychosocial support, to adapt to a changing environment.
- ↳ Expand the amount of financing and funding for child-focused climate action and drive financial innovation.



Examples of UNICEF’s ongoing work with partners to respond to the effects of climate change on social services include:



**Developing and maintaining resilient health-care facilities, nutrition centres and schools:** From 2019 to 2022, UNICEF supported the cyclone-resilient reconstruction or rehabilitation of 1,025 classrooms in Mozambique, benefiting more than 210,000 children. None of these classrooms was damaged by Cyclone Freddy in 2023. The design was adopted as a mandatory national standard by the government.



**Designing and constructing water points that are raised and protected from increased flooding, while also accessible:** In 2020, when 5.4 million people in Bangladesh were affected by severe floods that damaged housing and disrupted water systems, sanitation and livelihoods, UNICEF used the cost-effective ‘double-platform raised tube-well’ solution to enable equitable access to water.



**Supporting the creation of networks and groundwater monitoring stations to predict and prepare for droughts:** Working with the Ministry of Education and implementing partners, UNICEF Venezuela integrated WASH and climate solutions – such as solar power pumping and rainwater harvesting – to support 166,718 children in 259 schools in 12 states.



**Expanding renewable energy solutions to aid child development and reduce emissions:** By the end of 2021, UNICEF Malawi had installed 429 solar vaccine cold chain systems, assessed energy demand at more than 50 health-care facilities and installed solar photovoltaic systems in 20 health-care facilities, benefiting 1 million mothers, children and young people.



**Supporting children and families through strong social protection systems:** In 2020, UNICEF reached 1.7 million households in Kenya with cash transfers through *Inua Jamii*, the National Safety Net Programme. Working with the Swedish International Development Agency and partners, this programme also included the Energy Cash Plus initiative to subsidize access to sustainable energy for off-grid households with solar home systems, contributing to 3.4 hours more energy per day for children and their families.



In 2022, UNICEF provided cash transfers to vulnerable families, coupled with the establishment of community awareness-raising and monitoring mechanisms, as well as skills building for girls. This led to the prevention of 1,316 child marriage cases in 15 sites established for internally displaced people due to drought in Ethiopia.



**Providing access to the essential social services that displaced children need:** In areas such as the Horn of Africa, UNICEF supports mobile health clinics to continue to provide life-saving medical attention and nutritional support to displaced children and their caregivers. In refugee camps, UNICEF invests in education and health-care facilities and provides access to water, energy and learning materials for children as part of efforts delivered by the United Nations and the development community.

## What UNICEF will deliver

As part of UNICEF's commitment to accelerate progress, we will not only scale up our own efforts but also promote a global commitment to centre the response to the planetary crisis on the needs of children, particularly the most vulnerable.

UNICEF will implement specific interventions in every country it operates in, which will be selected and customized to address the local needs of children:

- i      **Support countries to focus on children** in responding to the planetary crisis by:
  - a.     Using data and undertaking risk and vulnerability analyses to focus on the greatest threats from the planetary crisis to children's futures
  - b.     Calibrating our emergency humanitarian programmes to planetary threats, including disasters
  - c.     Assessing the national climate and environmental policy landscape and providing support to better address the needs of children. Sustainable and far-reaching change will only occur when governments prioritize children in their efforts to protect the planet and are adequately supported to do so. UNICEF will work with partners to strengthen efforts of governments in understanding the impact of the planetary crisis on children and to prioritize them in their climate and environmental policies and budgets as laid out by General Comment 26. It will accelerate partnerships across the public and private sectors to implement the most promising solutions that combine child development and planetary sustainability, and support governments with objective ways of measuring our collective

progress, including as part of their national submissions to intergovernmental bodies (for example, the Nationally Determined Contributions [NDCs]).

- d.     Raising awareness of the threats and benefits of solutions in businesses, civil society and the general public to garner support for action targeting sectors directly
- e.     Forging coalitions across the private and public sectors, civil society community groups, youth groups and networks with a focus on improving the well-being and health of children
- ii      **Support countries to strengthen the resilience of social services** that matter most to children by:
  - a.     Developing the financial and socioeconomic justification for strengthening social services against environmental impacts, highlighting the benefits of doing this across critical sectors for children, supporting its efficient and effective incorporation into national budgeting frameworks and social protection systems, and advocating for greater international financial flows to support the countries where children are the most vulnerable
  - b.     Shaping and implementing standards for green and resilient social services in sectors
  - c.     Providing direct support for implementation, including strengthening infrastructure, building knowledge and skills with community and government workers, and updating government monitoring frameworks

- d. Supporting governments to include the most vulnerable children (including girls, migrant and displaced children, and those with disabilities) in emergency preparedness and response plans
- e. Creating and strengthening platforms for at-risk and crisis-affected populations and young people to engage in participatory planning, implementation, monitoring and feedback from the upstream policy level to the delivery of social services and provisions
- f. Strengthening community-based early prevention, detection and treatment of child malnutrition, often exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation
- g. Strengthening community-based child protection mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against children and gender-based violence, which are often exacerbated by scarce natural resources. This includes support to countries to strengthen the resilience, portability and inclusiveness of services to reach children (including the most vulnerable) as they move.
- h. Providing financing for anticipatory action and its implementation
- i. As part of recovery and rebuilding following disasters, making it standard practice to recommend solutions that reduce the risk of future disasters (for example, rebuilding schools to standards designed to withstand cyclones

and strengthening nature-based solutions) and advocating to humanitarian donors that this provides a better service and is more cost-effective

**iii Work to expand the amount of financing and funding** available for strengthening sustainable and climate-resilient social services and humanitarian action, particularly in countries where children are most vulnerable, by:

- a. Advocating for more international and domestic funding for the adaptation of essential social services and for humanitarian preparedness, anticipatory action and response
- b. Promoting reform of the international financial system so that funding for climate adaptation and resilience is more readily available to develop and implement child-sensitive programmes

**iv Drive technical and financial innovation** by:

- a. Aggregating demand for green and resilient social services across sectors, communities and countries to expand the market for sustainable services and using the scale and reach of our procurement network to improve the quality and reduce the costs of implementation
- b. Identifying and implementing promising sources of financing for longer-term resilience building and humanitarian action

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A family poses in Garissa County, Kenya, at the UNICEF-supported, solar-powered borehole facility, in 2022.



## Objective 2

EMPOWER every child through their life course with the developmental opportunities, education and skills to be a champion for the environment.

### The opportunity

**Children and young people not only bear the brunt of the planetary crisis but are also essential agents of change.** However, children and young people are still significantly **underrepresented and lack influence** in the world's political and democratic decision-making processes. UNICEF's research shows that almost 90 per cent of children and young people feel personally responsible for combating climate change.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, the long-term survival and prosperity of the planet depends upon today's children being equipped with values and habits to promote environmental sustainability, supported by their parents and caregivers.

### The pathways to progress

An investment now in equipping children and young people with the skills and tools to become champions for the planet will yield both immediate and long-term gains. Young people's early involvement in environmental activities can help them make tangible gains toward sustainability, while also developing a long-term commitment to sustainable habits and policies as they grow into future leaders and decision makers.

Throughout the world, UNICEF works with many youth and education partners to engage children and young people early, educating them on climate threats, giving them a stake in the outcomes and empowering them to take action. UNICEF's climate engagement programmes in 122 countries will drive change in three priority areas:

i     **Educate children and young people on the environment inside and outside the classroom.**

Education is critical to addressing issues like climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss. Early involvement in environmental education and direct immersion in nature can help young people understand the urgency of the issues, the consequences of inaction and their power to use their voices to change outcomes. With this support, children and young people can develop a lifelong commitment to sustainable habits and ultimately help shape strong public policies as they grow into future leaders and decision makers.

UNICEF's wide-ranging education programmes equip children and young people with the

information, skills and tools they need to be champions of environmental sustainability and provide parents and other caregivers with the tools they need to support greater engagement.

In 2020 alone, UNICEF facilitated the participation of 7.7 million children in 147 countries in skills development programmes and introduced modules on climate and the environment in education programmes for in-school and out-of-school young people.

ii     **Empower children and young people to take action in their communities.**

Every day, children and young people are demonstrating their ability to make meaningful change. Their long-term commitment often takes root when they engage in concrete actions that allow them to see the positive impacts of their contributions – whether it is through volunteerism, coordinated peer action or online education and mobilization campaigns.

UNICEF supports youth volunteer programmes and initiatives on issues such as water security, disaster risk reduction (DRR), pollution, sanitation, sustainable energy, conservation and biodiversity. UNICEF programmes have reached about 200 million young people in 40 countries. For example, U-Report, UNICEF's flagship digital platform that allows young people to connect and take action, has benefited nearly 30 million users in 93 countries and pioneered chatbots to build skills and mobilize around climate change.

iii      **Support youth-led advocacy to build public will for concerted action and influence decision makers to shape sustainable public policies.**

The CRC states that every person under the age of 18 has the right to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. This includes a public forum to express their views and support for them to do it.

Increasingly, young people are rising up and adding their voices to the climate debate. The power of their message and their actions have inspired others to join their efforts to shape public policy. Yet, despite their clear interest in addressing the planetary crisis, young people often find that when it comes to decision-making, they have no seat at the table.

UNICEF's comprehensive approach to climate advocacy invests in programmes that support youth in their campaigns to be part of the change they want to see in the world. The programmes focus on influencing public policy and decision-makers, and building public support for climate action at the local, regional and global levels. They include efforts to connect youth movements across the globe through central platforms and to assist young people in leading education and advocacy campaigns.

One of UNICEF's programmes, [Youth Advocates](#), offers young people opportunities to be agents of change by providing an online hub, training materials and in-depth content to support them in taking action and advocating for children's rights.<sup>20</sup>

Examples of education, climate action and advocacy programmes that UNICEF and its partners invested in to support children and young people include:



**Continuous learning in the face of disasters:** For children affected by climate events such as extreme weather and climate-induced displacement, UNICEF has developed the Learning Passport,\* a digital platform enabling over 2 million children to continue learning even if they cannot physically attend school. The UNICEF and International Telecommunication Union Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children, Information and Analysis (GIGA) has also allowed over 1 million students and teachers to access online distance learning. In 2022, UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched Gateways to Public Digital Learning, a United Nations flagship initiative to make digital education a public good.



**Educating and training on DRR and school safety:** In 2022, UNICEF and its partners in Kyrgyzstan equipped schools in disaster-prone areas with essential DRR supplies and equipment for greater school safety. A total of 247,852 students and 4,362 school administration staff also developed their emergency skills through DRR training and simulation exercises.



**Organizing and mobilizing:** In 2022, flooding in Chad damaged houses, turned roads into rivers and caused many injuries. UNICEF Chad employed U-Report to allow young people to organize and take action as part of its response. U-Reporters in affected areas assisted with evacuation and supplied essential items in their communities. Before the flooding, UNICEF teams had used U-Report to train young people on humanitarian action, including preparing them for rapid emergency responses and advocacy in the event of disaster. Through this contingency strategy, young people formed networks, which they termed 'U-Report communities.' Their engagement enabled a rapid response to the flooding. Adolescent girls are now developing a chatbot to deliver timely, adolescent-friendly information to their peers as part of national preparedness planning.



**Raising awareness on biodiversity:** In 2022, UNICEF supported the launch of the "One Child One Tree" (1C1T) Initiative in Madagascar, which was jointly implemented by the Regional Directorate of Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of National Education to raise awareness on biodiversity, environmental preservation, and sustainable development. In the Boeny region, the first 1C1T site, 42 school principals were trained in environmental education. This was followed by the education of 1,050 students (51% girls) in 42 schools on environmental and climate change topics, as well as the distribution of 4,000 plants intended for reforestation activities.



**Advocating for change:** UNICEF youth advocates and the Fridays for Future initiative supported the first environmental education law in Argentina, which ensures that educational content is defined by a range of stakeholders – including indigenous peoples, students, teachers, unions, scientists, recyclers and environmental organizations – to guarantee multisectoral participation. UNICEF, together with its partner Jóvenes por el Clima,\*\* helped bring 300 young people together to engage in talks with the government.

\* UNICEF's Learning Passport is an online, mobile and offline learning platform enabling high-quality, flexible learning and providing equitable, inclusive education for millions through localized content.

\*\* Translates as "Young People for the Climate."



## What UNICEF will deliver

UNICEF will implement specific interventions in every country it operates in, which will be selected and customized to address the local needs of children:

**i      Provide children and young people with education and green skills by:**

- a. Providing parenting and early learning programmes on sustainable and healthy lifestyles
- b. Mainstreaming climate change education in national curricula
- c. Equipping teachers and early childhood development (ECD) service providers with the tools to teach climate change awareness and action
- d. Expanding access to digital and edutainment platforms and resources to ensure that accurate, age-appropriate and accessible information is widely available on climate action and environmental preservation
- e. Advocating at local, national and intergovernmental levels to have sustainability and climate education recognized as an essential tool for addressing the planetary crisis
- f. Supporting governments to integrate environmental sustainability and action in education plans and budgets
- g. Working with governments and partners to improve the provision of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects
- h. Supporting adolescents to develop the green skills they need to participate in the green economy, including STEM digital skills for girls
- i. Building on our existing platforms, such as the Learning Passport, to provide learning continuity in crises
- j. Rolling out approaches to climate change and resilience education to strengthen skills, knowledge and practices at school and community levels in relation to environmental hazards, climate change and other risks to children and the education system

- k. Supporting ecopreneurship as part of major UNICEF initiatives such as the Green Jobs for Youth Pact and the Green Rising

Through this work, children and young people will understand the significant impacts of the planetary crisis, their role in mitigating its effects and the need to prepare, adapt and act in the face of disaster.

**ii      Support environmental action by:**

- a. Improving community climate resilience by training young people to assess school safety in areas affected by or at risk of climate change
- b. Enhancing parenting practices to promote nurturing environments for young children
- c. Supporting school clubs on climate action and environmental preservation
- d. Starting and scaling up green ventures that build climate resilience and close the skills gap in developing countries (particularly among the most vulnerable), targeting areas such as renewable energy, circular economy waste innovation and air pollution through boot camps, mentorships, industry leader connections and seed funding
- e. Supporting youth-led social movements to foster sustainable and healthy lifestyles for children and young people
- f. Providing mental health and psychosocial services to young environmental activists and building capacity among youth organizations to incorporate mental health and well-being
- g. Supporting youth-led climate action and environmental preservation projects
- h. Scaling up youth volunteer initiatives, creating new green volunteer programmes and using U-Report for youth action on climate change
- i. Promoting the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices and lifestyles for children and young people, including using applied behavioural science tactics, support for social movements and shifting social norms

\* Ecopreneurship = environmental entrepreneurship.

By supporting children and young people to take collective action to adapt to the planetary crisis, they can protect themselves, their families and their communities; inspire others to follow them and change their own behaviours; and spark greater systemic and cultural change.

**iii      Drive advocacy for the planet by:**

- a. Amplifying the voices of children and young people by supporting youth organizations and advocates and their caregivers/parents
- b. Training children and young people in, and providing funding for, effective advocacy, negotiation and campaigning

- c. Facilitating children and young people's access to decision-making on sustainability and climate at local, national and intergovernmental levels
- d. Deepening connections between youth movements across the world
- e. Supporting children and young people to educate policymakers and other stakeholders on the urgent need for action

By supporting children and young people in advocating for their rights to a safer, more sustainable planet and using their collective voices, UNICEF prepares them to drive change in their communities, their countries and the world.

© UNICEF/UN0626796/Tomislav Georgiev  
A fourth-grade student in a North Macedonia school learns about the environment and climate change in 2022. UNICEF supports the experiential skills-building programme that aims to empower children as champions for the environment.



### Objective 3

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.

#### The opportunity

UNICEF's commitment to confronting the planetary crisis and accelerating efforts to reduce harmful emissions and promote a just transition to a nature-positive and carbon-neutral world starts internally – with a renewed emphasis on our operations, workplace policies and ability to influence the behaviours of our global network of partners and vendors.

The Action Plan capitalizes on UNICEF's role as an advocate for and with children – as well as our relationship with governments, the private sector and civil society – to drive progress internally and create momentum to achieve the Paris Agreement targets and goals, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UNICEF will use all its major levers inside and outside the organization to accelerate progress –working with our committed staff to reduce our own emissions, leveraging our procurement network in 116 countries, using our voice and our worldwide standing to call on countries, the private sector and other key actors to redouble their commitments to reduce emissions, and advocating for the fulfilment of ambitious international sustainability and climate agreements and goals to prevent the worst effects of the planetary crisis on children.



#### A sample: Multilateral sustainability and climate agreements

- ↳ The **Paris Agreement** brings the world together in a common effort to combat climate change, adapt to its effects and mobilize climate finance.
- ↳ The **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** guides the multi-hazard management of disaster risk in development.
- ↳ The **Convention on Biological Diversity** promotes conservation, sustainable use, and fair benefit-sharing of biological diversity.
- ↳ The **Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam conventions**, amongst others, addresses different hazardous chemicals, waste and the protection of human health.
- ↳ Through **resolution 76/300**, the United Nations General Assembly recognized that there is a basic human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and in 2023 the CRC affirmed the obligations of government signatories to safeguard this right for children.
- ↳ The **General Comment No. 26 on Children's Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change** affirms the children's right to a clean, healthy **and** sustainable environment and issues interpretation of states' obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## The pathways to progress

The Action Plan puts UNICEF's ongoing commitments on a fast track in three specific areas:

### i Accelerate the reduction of UNICEF's environmental footprint.

UNICEF has already made substantial progress in reducing our own internal greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Since 2010, we have reduced emissions by 33 per cent. We currently source 32 per cent of our electricity from renewable sources. We track resource consumption, including energy, water and waste, ground and air travel, and office accessibility using our environmental management system. The outcomes are used to prioritize energy-intensive offices and conduct regional audits to suggest ways of reducing our emissions.

To date, UNICEF has improved sustainability and accessibility across offices by switching to renewable energy, adopting energy and water efficiency measures and green building certifications for new office buildings, as well as improving accessibility of its premises. An internal surcharge on staff air travel is used to

co-fund eco-efficiency and disability inclusion initiatives in our offices. Our 'green teams,' comprising staff in over 100 offices, raise staff awareness and influence behaviour to increase environmental responsibility.

UNICEF has been carbon neutral in its operations since 2015 by offsetting all unavoidable operational emissions, including staff travel, through the purchase of carbon credits from the Adaptation Fund. By 2030, UNICEF aims to reduce its internal GHG emissions by 45 per cent through an ambitious net-zero strategy and is developing a coordinated plan towards a documented and monitored UNICEF 'net-zero' or 'nature positive' strategy.

Equally important, UNICEF is working towards the organization-wide implementation of a comprehensive set of environmental and social safeguards (ESS) to ensure that country offices understand the current and future risks and impact of our programmes, and that appropriate mitigating measures are identified, implemented and monitored.

© 2018 UNICEF Tanzania

In 2018-2019, technicians installed a system of 105 KW solar panels on the UNICEF Tanzania rooftop, allowing it to use power from the national grid only sporadically and at night to improve eco-efficiency. These panels should reduce carbon emissions by approximately 170,000-210,000 kg per year.



**ii Develop sustainable strategies with partners, including suppliers, governments and the private sector.**

UNICEF has the United Nation's largest procurement network. Over 1,300 staff in 116 countries coordinate procurement and delivery of supplies around the world every day. In 2022, during the pandemic, UNICEF procured a record USD \$7.383 billion in goods and services for children in 162 countries and geographic areas in the face of COVID-19, cholera epidemics and other threats to children and their communities.

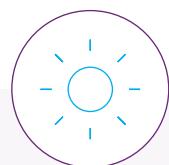
UNICEF's significant reach, purchasing power, investments and annual expenditures allow us to shape the behaviour of those who have a long-term stake in working with us on behalf of children in delivering social services and humanitarian aid.

UNICEF's sustainability agenda for its supply and procurement arm has been informed by the wider United Nations system strategic framework for sustainability management

that set specific indicators and targets for measuring progress.<sup>21</sup> To date, UNICEF has improved sustainability in its procurement and work with partners by developing markets for sustainable products and services. To increase its contribution to the SDGs, UNICEF applies a strategic procurement framework to its supply operations to optimize its procurement approach and help achieve sustainable development.

**iii Advocate for emissions reductions and adaption policies at global and regional forums with and for children and young people.**

UNICEF's advocacy takes many forms, whether it is building widespread support for climate action at global and regional levels like the annual UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COPs) or urging progress on achieving the Paris Agreement goals, and the SDGs. We continue to advocate for a broad range of mitigation efforts and adaptation policies to address the climate crisis for children.



Examples of UNICEF's ongoing work to leverage its programmes, policies, purchasing power and organizational standing to reduce emissions include:



**Shaping supply markets:** Between 2017 and 2021, UNICEF shaped the market for ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) from a single supplier in 2006 to 21 suppliers across the globe. By diversifying production sites and reducing the use of emergency air freight, UNICEF reduced the carbon footprint of transporting RUTF by approximately 90 per cent.



In the Global South, UNICEF and its partners identified a new generation of solar direct-drive refrigerators and freezers to provide COVID-19 vaccine storage in areas without reliable access to electricity. This shift away from the earlier solar models and gas-powered or generator-powered fridges has re-shaped the market.



**Driving sustainable energy solutions with governments:** With the Government of Mongolia, UNICEF is retrofitting kindergartens with better insulation, ventilation and air filtration, including with electric heating systems to improve indoor air quality and increase energy efficiency while improving the learning environment for young children.

## What UNICEF will deliver

- i      Drive the internal sustainability agenda to reduce internal GHG emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 (in line with the United Nations Secretariat Climate Action Plan) by:**
- a. Tracking and reporting on environmental sustainability performance
  - b. Increasingly sourcing electricity from renewable energy
  - c. Accelerating the use of energy- and resource-efficient equipment and behaviour change campaigns, for example by solarizing at least 10 facilities each year
  - d. Accelerating efforts to reduce emissions from travel without negatively affecting the ability of the organization to deliver its mandate
  - e. Reducing UNICEF's digital environmental footprint by adopting greener information and communication technology (ICT) tools
  - f. Establishing environmental targets (e.g., energy, water, waste and travel reduction)\*
- In line with the United Nations Secretariat Climate Action Plan, the internal sustainability agenda will be driven by environmental objectives and targets on other significant aspects that affect the environment.
- ii      Pursue environmental and social safeguards by:**
- a. Driving sustainability in all programmes and ensuring that UNICEF's interventions and projects do not have a negative impact on the environment, cultural heritage, health or safety of the people it serves
  - b. Screening all policies, programmes and activities to determine the risks and potential impacts
  - c. Assessing adverse impacts to ensure these are avoided or minimized, mitigated, managed and monitored when avoidance is not possible

- d. Establishing safeguarding measures during the country programming planning process and the design of projects
- e. Committing programmes and operations – including those delegated to our implementing partners, vendors and suppliers – to comply with UNICEF's ESS policy

UNICEF will work towards establishing a comprehensive framework that allows anyone to be able to raise ESS concerns, and UNICEF will provide a safe and accessible way for them to do so. The goal is to ensure that all programmes and activities are environmentally and socially responsible.

- iii      Build on efforts to drive sustainability within our Supply Division by:**
- a. Decreasing GHG emissions within internal operations and the supply chain
  - b. Ensuring supply and logistics functions contribute to positive environmental, social and economic development
  - c. Identifying hot spots and risks by analysis of emissions and market levers
  - d. Developing a supply policy to meet International Organization for Standardization requirements
  - e. Identifying opportunities for triple wins\*\* with private and public sector partners to influence sustainable markets for children

\* These must include targets on other significant aspects that affect the environment (e.g., air and ground travel, procurement, events, meetings and biodiversity).

\*\* Triple wins: (1) responding rapidly to emergencies, whether from climate- and disaster-linked events or from other hazards; (2) diversifying our manufacturing footprint; and (3) reducing our carbon footprint and improving product profiles for low-resource settings.



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In 2022, children and young people in Fiji participated in a disaster risk reduction video following a bootcamp for young people that focused on using human-centred design to develop innovative solutions on DRR and climate change adaptation.

## Enabling the transition from planning to implementation to results

UNICEF has identified three drivers – ‘foundational elements’, ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘focused areas of acceleration’ – to implement the Action Plan objectives.

These drivers accelerate the delivery of results from ongoing work, build capacity for new work and integrate sustainability and climate action throughout the organization.

They transform our approach to sustainability and climate action and will deliver rapid results in key areas while recognizing UNICEF offices’ varying capacities and contexts in which they engage.\*

\* The applicability to UNICEF National Committee offices is being evaluated.



## Drivers of implementation



Rapidly enhance the capacity of all UNICEF offices to efficiently implement the objectives and to engage in larger-scale programming and advocacy.

**These foundational elements will be implemented in every UNICEF country office by 2025.**

Systematically integrate the additionality required for the objectives in our planning, implementation and monitoring at the country, regional, and headquarter levels to embed sustainability and climate action as a core offering across the organization.  
**UNICEF will have a cohort of 50 countries that demonstrate this by 2025.**

A small number of focused initiatives that span our key objectives and have the potential to demonstrate rapid results for children globally. This document describes an initial set of accelerators that will be periodically updated. Each of these areas is accompanied by indicative results. These results and associated targets will be set during discussions with partners to identify opportunities to maximize our impact together.

## Foundational elements

The foundational elements will provide all UNICEF offices with readiness – the road map, expertise, tools and support they need to integrate sustainability, low-carbon development and climate resilience into strategies, programming, operations and advocacy.

The capacity and readiness to fulfil our mandate is increasingly essential for securing additional finance, which is crucial for maximizing the impact of our initial investment in sustainability and climate action.

© UNICEF/UN0543493/Christian Åslund  
On 22 October 2021 in Stockholm, Sweden, Edwin (carrying sign reading "Varning"), and Evelyn (second row), both from Uganda, join other climate activists taking part in a Fridays for Future global strike – calling for stronger commitments by governments to take concrete and corrective action to avert catastrophic climate change.



## Planned results

By 2025, UNICEF country offices will have established the following foundational elements:

Action	By 2025, each country office will have... (as evidenced by)
<b>Country commitment</b>	A country-level sustainability strategy for planning and engagement, including government policy support, has been developed and <b>at least one (1) area of acceleration prioritized</b> (Output in AWP).
<b>Foundational data and analysis</b>	Identified the most pressing climate and environmental threats facing children and the best ways to protect them from these risks (CLAC or sub-national CCRI).
<b>Tracking results</b>	Continuous reporting on strategic plan sustainability indicators and expenditure tracking has been implemented (CEED marker, CSI).
<b>Staff capacity building</b>	All staff members have received sustainability training (Agora course).
<b>Listen to children's voices</b>	Platforms to involve children and young people in sustainability and climate action have been established (U-Report or youth council).
<b>Internal Environmental Opportunity Assessment for Greening</b>	Greenhouse gas emissions reduced towards an organization-wide target of 33.75% and 40% of electricity sourced from renewables (Environmental Footprint and Accessibility Assessment [EFAAT]).
<b>Implement Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)</b>	All interventions have been screened for environmental and social impacts. An ESS system has been implemented and mitigating actions have been identified, implemented and monitored (ESS implemented).

## Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming sustainability and climate action in UNICEF means incorporating sustainable objectives, principles and practices into all aspects of the organization's work. Climate change, disaster risk and environmental degradation are addressed as integral components of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

UNICEF is focused on two main areas of work to mainstream sustainability and climate work.

- i     **Integrate sustainability and climate action throughout the country programme management cycle** (Figure 3).

We must ensure coherence with international and national government policies and plans, including climate-centric strategies such as NDCs, national adaptation plans (NAPs), country energy policies and national DRR strategies. Mainstreaming must also encompass the design and implementation of climate-inclusive or -responsive social sector strategies in areas such as WASH, health, education, nutrition, child protection and social protection.

UNICEF's [toolkit for integrating sustainability and climate action into programming](#) makes the following recommendations:

- ↳ Allocate staff to lead the transition to sustainable practices, educate colleagues and partners, and provide training opportunities
- ↳ Integrate sustainability and climate-related questions into studies, evaluations and assessments in cooperation with stakeholders and use the results develop a sustainability and climate plan, as well as to mobilize resources and secure funding
- ↳ Design, implement and evaluate programmes and advocacy work based on climate, disaster and environmental risks
- ↳ Ensure that ESS are in place to promote sustainable development and protect vulnerable communities and ecosystems

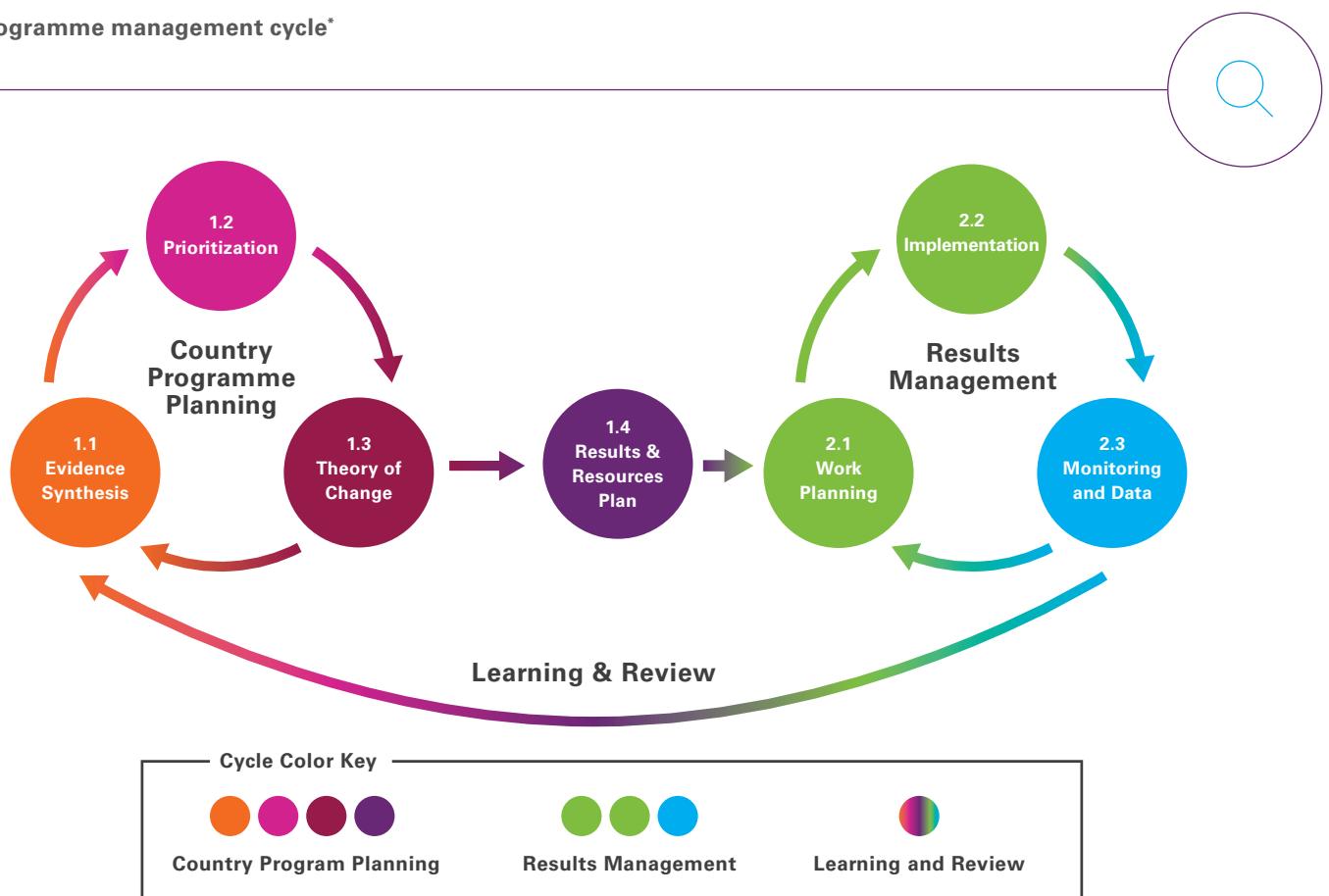
↳ Track and report on sustainability and climate-related outcomes, progress on ESSs, GHG emissions, consumption of resources (such as energy, water and travel) and waste generation from programmes and operations

## ii **Provide technical support at global, regional and country levels.**

### a. **UNICEF's headquarter sectors and divisions mainstream sustainability and climate action.**

**UNICEF's headquarter sectors and divisions mainstream sustainability and climate action.** The global divisions and sectors include comprehensive guidance and support for the additionality required to mainstream sustainability and climate into programme and country strategies, including providing technical, capacity building and resource mobilization support to regional and country offices. Additionally, a Global Technical Team (GTT) will be established to support sustainability and climate work.

Figure 3  
**Country programme management cycle\***



\* See [Country Programme Plan guidance](#).

Climate change, disaster risk and environmental degradation are addressed as integral components of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

**Our global sectors increasingly demonstrate our ability to mainstream sustainability in all our programming.** For example:

- ↳ UNICEF's WASH programme has embarked on an ambitious SHIFT to make all of its WASH programmes climate ready. This means ensuring that WASH infrastructure and services are sustainable, safe and resilient, and that WASH systems contribute to community resilience.
- ↳ Our global health programme is mainstreaming climate and environmental considerations through its Healthy Environments for Healthy Children framework,<sup>22</sup> so that UNICEF's programmes for survival, health and well-being elevate action on climate change and environmental degradation for and with young people, in response to the local burden of disease and risk factors. UNICEF is aiming for a whole-of-society approach to collective action and global coordination on children's environmental health across issues, borders, sectors and partners to have a lasting impact for children.
- ↳ UNICEF is supporting countries to implement the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF) and working with policymakers, planners, school administrators and partners to promote child rights, sustainability and resilience in the education sector.\* Increasingly, UNICEF's education work focuses on both the risks to education access and the opportunities to change mindsets and drive sustainable lifestyles through sustainability education, practical skills building, policy engagement and support for funding and financing from sustainability and climate streams.
- ↳ UNICEF's Global Social Protection Framework identifies key actions to prepare and adapt to climate and environmental shocks, including the need to ensure social protection systems are shock-responsive and the need for more detailed programme guidance for strengthening shock-

responsive social protection systems. UNICEF is increasingly collaborating with governments on shock-responsive social protection to enhance the adaptability of national social protection services in the face of disasters and climate shocks, ensuring that the most vulnerable children and households have access to essential goods and services, which can include cash transfers.

- ↳ UNICEF's Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030 recognizes the global climate crisis as one of the drivers of the emerging face of child malnutrition and guides UNICEF programmes across countries and regions with context-specific interventions to ensure that children have access to nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition practices in settings made fragile by the climate crisis.
- ↳ In addition to a focus on the critical effects that a degrading planet can have on early childhood development, UNICEF's child protection and migration programmes are increasingly influenced by displacement and child marriage driven by climate change, with an institutional action plan on internal displacement that identifies specific actions UNICEF will take to prevent and minimize the risk of future internal displacement. Across our work, UNICEF works not only with governments but also with individuals and communities to support local action towards a more sustainable society.

Our Core Commitments for Children, which govern our conduct during humanitarian emergencies, recognize the importance of safeguarding the environment during humanitarian operations and promote solutions that contribute to longer-term environmental sustainability. All UNICEF's work has a strong focus on ensuring that the most vulnerable children – such as girls, children on the move and those with disabilities – are a priority for action.

\* CSSF implementation is being coordinated via the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the education sector (GADRRRES), UNICEF and nearly 20 international partners, with the CSSF being utilized in more than 60 countries today. See <https://gadrrres.net/comprehensive-school-safety-framework/>.

- b. **Seven regional offices support country offices, integrating sustainability and climate action into regional plans and guidance.** This support includes multi-country programming and advocacy, capacity-building, knowledge sharing, networking, partnerships

and financing opportunities. Regional offices will use their unique position to continue scaling up regional flagship and other programmes and engaging in global technical discussions.

#### Planned results

By 2025, UNICEF will demonstrate proof of integrated delivery in a cohort of 50 countries where children are at high risk with the following elements:

Action	Result (as evidenced by)
<b>Sustainable social service design &amp; implementation</b>	UNICEF is actively implementing coordinated multisectoral programmes on climate, environmental sustainability, sustainable energy and/or DRR in response to the major threats facing children in the country (UNICEF country programme documents and work plans are reflective of a child-focused climate and environmental rationale and risk assessment).
<b>Policy advocacy and awareness raising</b>	Country Office is supporting the integration of children's vulnerability to climate, environmental, and disaster risks and solutions into national sustainability and climate policy documents (such as NDCs, disaster risk management plans and NAPs), as well as running regular communication and advocacy campaigns and convenings of decision-makers on child-focused climate, environmental, and disaster response (Government policies and strategies are updated or newly instituted, resulting in increased attention and action to addressing children's vulnerability to climate, environmental and disaster risks).
<b>Sustainable social service budgeting</b>	Country Office is supporting government budgeting for initiatives and services that emphasize children's priorities in climate, environmental, and disaster preparedness and response (Development of cost/benefit analysis for sustainability and climate action into social services and updating of sustainability/climate and line ministry budgets).
<b>Youth empowerment and skill-building</b>	Country Office is actively supporting governments to empower children, adolescents and young people to be champions for the planet.  Country Office is providing support to governments for the integration of climate, energy, environment, and/or disaster risk education and skills (including policy advocacy).
<b>Internal greening and ESS</b>	Country Office is conducting office improvements to reduce environmental footprint, staff resource reduction campaigns, and improvement of supplier/vendor ESS compliance (EFAAT assessment reviews, ESS reviews).

## Focused areas of acceleration

Key to expanding our investment and demonstrating impact across our key objectives is identifying a small set of focused initiatives that build upon programme commitments in multiple regions, have the potential for innovation, and where UNICEF is uniquely positioned to deliver results. These areas will be updated periodically.

The four initial areas of acceleration are:

- ↪ **Climate-informed risk reduction, humanitarian action and resilient recovery from disasters**
- ↪ **Sustainable energy for health-care facilities, schools and WASH**

↪ **Sustainable WASH services in areas most vulnerable to climate change**

↪ **Pathways for young people to be more effective champions for sustainability.**

Each of these areas is accompanied by indicative results. These results and associated targets will be set during discussions with partners to identify opportunities to maximize our impact together.

### Climate-informed risk reduction, humanitarian action and resilient recovery from disasters

To be effective, DRR and humanitarian efforts need to be calibrated to a changing climate. They also need to consider projected future changes in risk. To protect children, UNICEF will work to prevent new disaster risks, reduce existing risks, manage residual risks, prepare governments, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from disasters, and strengthen resilience and reduce disaster losses.

Disaster risk management has traditionally been based on historical losses and disconnected to climate change agendas. However, climate change adaptation (CCA) can build on over 50 years of experience in DRR, including disaster risk information/data, systems, networks and solutions on the ground.

DRR creates the opportunity to do things differently, and build back better rather than simply rebuild the same vulnerabilities for children. The economic case is robust – every dollar invested in climate resilience has a return of more than three dollars, and occasionally up to \$50, depending on the sector.<sup>23</sup> UNICEF will use its leadership in DRR across our sectors to bring climate change-informed, environmentally sustainable, and resilience-building interventions across the whole disaster management cycle, including in the interagency recovery process. This includes rebuilding infrastructure and service lines to be more resilient, engaging communities in risk reduction and resilience education (such as school safety procedures using the CSSF<sup>24</sup>), training disaster risk management professionals and integrating the additional costs incurred by climate resilience into government policies and budgets.

#### The challenge

**Disasters exacerbated by climate change, such as floods, cyclones and droughts, can be devastating for children and their communities**, leading to loss of life, injury, displacement, and long-term disruption to services, including but not limited to health, education, nutrition, child protection and WASH. In the twentieth century, disasters affected some 66 million children worldwide each year, and this is expected to triple in the coming decades.<sup>25</sup>

The increasing frequency and severity of disaster events – exacerbated by the accelerating planetary crisis, environmental degradation and inadequate risk governance systems – mean that children and young people need immediate action to build resilience and ensure that these events do not end children's hope of a better future.

## What UNICEF will deliver

**Adapt DRR, preparedness frameworks and EWSs to a changing climate and prioritize children's needs and opportunities for engagement.** This means working with communities, governments, and partners to identify the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by children in different regions and tailor CCA, resilience building and disaster preparedness planning accordingly. By systematizing and prioritizing children's needs and investing at scale, based on child-centred data/evidence, we can reduce disasters' effects on children. Building on the DRR network's damage and loss accounting systems and piloting new methodologies for subnational integrated climate and disaster risk information tailored to children, UNICEF is calling for loss and damage mechanisms to address the unpreventable effects of disasters on children, including through adaptive social protection systems and child-sensitive migration management. Children's and young people's own experiences will be used to create solutions on the ground, such as safer schools and more inclusive risk assessments and disaster management plans.

**Advance child-responsive climate information services.** These services are integral for programming and to shape government and stakeholder commitments and action on the ground.\* UNICEF tools will be used at global, national and subnational levels. Their use across both emergencies and longer-term development will align the humanitarian and development agendas to build climate and disaster resilience:

- ↳ UNICEF's CCRI will continue to strengthen disaster risk-informed programming and planning processes by generating global evidence on children's exposure to climate and environmental hazards, shocks, and stresses.
- ↳ At national and subnational levels, UNICEF will use a subnational CCRI-disaster risk model to identify the most vulnerable children and the most critical services that are at risk and to inform government plans, policies, and interventions (including updating EWSs).

## Include child-sensitive DRR in national budgets.

This can be done by making contingency financing mechanisms available to address and recover from emergencies, including those exacerbated by climate change. We will work to ensure that child-sensitive shock-responsive social protection mechanisms are set up to ensure an effective response to hazardous events. Effective social protection support is often a crucial factor in determining whether the lives of children and young people can quickly return to normality or whether they will be permanently altered.

**Improve anticipatory action** so that children and their communities can respond to disasters faster and more effectively. Anticipatory action is a cornerstone of better risk management and mitigation. It means taking action to prevent or mitigate the potential impact of a shock before it occurs, even in ongoing crises. Recent examples include adapting social protection systems to cope with more frequent climate and environmental impacts or making direct cash transfers to households exposed to imminent known threats. We will work with communities to identify and implement measures to build resilience before a disaster strikes, such as reinforcing infrastructure, stockpiling emergency supplies and using child-responsive EWSs. Taking such proactive measures reduces the negative impacts of impending disasters and improves the ability of children and their communities to cope, recover and build resilience.

## Strengthen child-responsive social protection.\*\*

UNICEF's aim is to ensure that national social protection services have the flexibility to adjust to stresses and shocks and to rapidly expand services to those who urgently need support after a disaster. Responding to crises effectively through national social protection systems requires appropriate, strategic investment before crises, in addition to responses during emergencies. We provide support for assessing the preparedness of social protection systems, for developing road maps to support reforms, and for building and enhancing social protection delivery and monitoring systems to allow their rapid expansion during emergencies.

\* Such as for EWSs, policymaking, better response planning, making damage and loss accounting more effective and accurate for children, urban planning, and prioritizing and implementing resilience-building interventions.

\*\* UNICEF's work in climate and disaster risk financing has traditionally focused on setting up systems and building capacity for shock-responsive social protection, including cash transfer mechanisms, and working with government ministries so that financial flows are allocated effectively. For example, UNICEF has developed pre-arranged financing mechanisms and shock-responsive social protection systems in 17 countries, enabling communities to access resources and support quickly and efficiently after disasters, reducing the potential negative effects, including poverty and food insecurity, promoting economic empowerment and improving communities' ability to cope and recover.

**Provide immediate humanitarian assistance while focusing on building disaster resilience ('building back better').** We will support the integration of DRR/CCA into humanitarian response and recovery, including through nature-based solutions. This work requires us

to focus on the services that children need most, while ensuring that they are inclusive of and accessible to the most at-risk and excluded groups (including girls, children on the move, indigenous peoples and children with disabilities).

### Planned results

In all countries where UNICEF operates, every child has systems and resources in place to protect them from the worst effects of climate change and disasters.

By 2025:

- ↳ Child responsive EWS in alignment with the Secretary-General's Early Warnings for All (EW4All) initiative
- ↳ A reference standard for a national DRR and CCA child participation framework so that children's voices (including the most vulnerable) are heard, and their views are taken into account in all decision-making that affects them
- ↳ A global network of countries engaging children and young people in action and advocacy to address disaster risks, including those related to climate change
- ↳ Scaled up public/private disaster risk financing solutions targeted towards children across both slow- and rapid-onset disasters and that are holistically addressing longer-term resilience, preparedness, anticipatory action and resilient recovery

↳ A global network of countries that have increased their national budgetary allocation for increasing resilience in children and young people, with a focus on adapting social services to a changing climate and prioritizing children's needs

By 2030:

- ↳ Countries have conducted a comprehensive child-centred risk assessment that takes into account the perspectives and vulnerabilities of children and their communities and uses the data to inform DRR and CCA, preparedness planning, and wider peace and development agendas
- ↳ Countries have established child-responsive and climate-calibrated preparedness frameworks and anticipatory action
- ↳ Countries have increased their national budgetary allocation for increasing resilience in children and young people, with a focus on adapting social services to a changing climate and prioritizing children's needs

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In 2019, Nur (yellow scarf) attended a workshop on installing and repairing solar panels that are ubiquitous in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Here she is learning how to prepare her tools for an installation.





UNICEF has deployed an award-winning innovative finance solution with the **Today and Tomorrow** (T&T) initiative, the world's first integrated climate and disaster risk finance mechanism specifically targeted at and designed for children. The initiative combines greater investment in locally-led climate resilience and anticipatory action today, with innovative use of a pre-arranged parametric disaster risk transfer solution for extra protection for children and their communities tomorrow, enabling faster recovery from the growing impact of climate change-fuelled humanitarian disasters. The **Today** pillar provides technical assistance and climate finance for child-centred CCA, DRR and anticipatory action to prevent and minimize climate risks and build longer-term climate resilience. The **Tomorrow** pillar delivers rapid financing for relief and resilient recovery after disasters through parametric insurance with an explicit focus on children. Initially, the T&T initiative is being piloted for three years from 2023-2025 across eight countries and four cyclone basins – the Caribbean (Haiti), East African (Comoros, Madagascar, Mozambique), South Asia (Bangladesh) and the Pacific islands (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu). The initiative is being expanded to other climate hazards and geographies.

## Sustainable energy for health-care facilities, schools and WASH

**Electricity is a critical enabler of greatly improved quality, accessible and reliable education, health-care and WASH services for children.** In health-care and educational facilities, electricity can provide lighting, heating, cooling, water services and digital connectivity. Decentralized sustainable energy solutions are becoming increasingly financially and technically viable.

Providing sustainable energy is key to pursuing a just energy transition and ensuring community and household social and economic needs are met globally. UNICEF supports energy provision such as off-grid solar in these essential services, including the equipment and training required. The path to cost-effective sustainable energy will require effective partnerships and greater financial investments, as well as continuous policy support to governments and community engagement to ensure long-term sustainability.

### The challenge

**The global gap in access to energy for these critical services threatens a child's ability to survive and thrive.** In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, only a quarter of health centres and a fifth of schools have access to reliable electricity. Moreover, energy provision is not often adequately linked to the availability of devices and equipment that must be powered.

As developed countries race to embrace renewable energy, the global energy gap is set to widen, significantly affecting developing countries that still rely on fossil fuels. Improving access to solar-powered water and electricity in under-resourced schools, health centres and communities is a critical component of a just transition and will help bridge this global gap, while helping to address indoor air pollution.

### What UNICEF will deliver

**Develop a package of services to enable reliable access to energy for water, health and education facilities in communities** that lack reliable sources of electricity, with a focus on sustainable and resilient

energy from decentralized renewable sources in the social sectors essential for children. UNICEF will work to deliver on the following package of services in partnership with local communities and others:

- ↪ An **assessment package**. An energy service needs assessment will determine energy needed by schools, health centres and community water systems and identify bottlenecks at various levels, including the equipment to be powered. A climate risk and vulnerability assessment will quantify the climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits of implementation.
- ↪ **Aggregation of demand** across sectors and communities. This determination will define the true size of the market for sustainable energy services and the equipment to be powered, and create a larger, more attractive market for providers. A larger market also enables economies of scale, thus reducing costs, attracting new suppliers and spurring innovation.
- ↪ Implementation of sustainable and efficient **energy solutions**. This includes technical assistance for energy system design, procurement services, engagement on regulatory approvals with government, and financing to ease barriers to sustainable energy services.
- ↪ **Operations and maintenance support**. This includes training facility staff in basic operations and maintenance and establishing and monitoring regular maintenance schedules and protocols. It also includes developing local capacity for operations and maintenance (especially with young people) and creating partnerships with private sector providers with the technical expertise and resources to maintain sustainable energy systems and powered equipment.
- ↪ **Policy and budget integration**. This includes supporting governments to integrate sustainable energy provision into health, education and water sector policies. Integration is done at sector level and with the government agencies responsible for energy service regulation, and it includes supporting governments with budget allocation and financing mechanisms.
- ↪ Promotion of **national and global advocacy** for sustainable energy in public facilities to raise awareness, mobilize resources and create an enabling environment for the initiatives. This will emphasize the social, economic and environmental benefits of sustainable energy in public facilities and the potential for these initiatives to contribute to achieving global goals such as the SDGs.
- ↪ **Capacity and skills package**. All elements will be sustained by building capacity and developing skills at community, local authority and ministry levels, including providing access to technical expertise and funding at the government, company and donor levels. Uniquely, UNICEF's solar hubs provide technical assistance to governments and partners, develop manuals, conduct training, and work with local authorities to promote solar technology where feasible. UNICEF will also support opportunities for young people to develop technical capacity and green skills.
- ↪ **Innovation**. UNICEF will drive innovative approaches through business case development, knowledge partnerships, STEM curriculum development, decision support procurement tools and new finance models to support sustainable energy.



 In Lebanon, UNICEF supported the solarization of 90 per cent of all suitable primary health-care centres via long-term agreements with four solarization companies in 2022. This model will reduce out-of-pocket health expenses by 9 per cent and maintain uninterrupted immunization services for children, leading to better overall health outcomes.

## Planned results

By 2025:

- ↳ Reference standards for green curriculum, including solar skills, are developed, piloted and distributed
- ↳ Package of financial and technical innovations developed and made accessible to partner governments
- ↳ Health facilities are equipped and sustained with reliable sustainable energy and health-care equipment for primary health-care services and WASH
- ↳ Water systems are powered and maintained by sustainable energy, providing a reliable, safe and sustainable water supply
- ↳ Schools are equipped and sustained with sustainable energy for heating, cooling, digital devices, lighting, cooking, water delivery and purification, staff housing, administrative management and internet access

↳ Sustainable energy for health, education and WASH services included in new national climate commitments (such as NDCs) and government energy policies

↳ The case for co-benefits from sustainable energy in health, education and WASH facilities is publicized to gain policy support

By 2030:

- ↳ All children have uninterrupted access to sustainable energy-powered water, health-care and education services

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Anila (11) poses at a UNICEF Water Desalination Site located in the Androy region of Madagascar in 2023. The plant provides clean and safe drinking water to the local community, which has been struggling with access to clean water for many years. The plant is powered solely by solar energy and backed up by a generator in case of an emergency.



**Investing in water security and the climate resilience of WASH services unlocks opportunities beyond the direct impact on children.** For instance, safe, gender-responsive, inclusive and reliable WASH services are essential for businesses and economies. Research shows that every \$1 spent on addressing

water risks to business could save more than \$5 in future costs incurred if action is not taken.<sup>26</sup> Ensuring that safe and sustainable WASH services are available for all can also open up new market opportunities and strengthen engagement of the private sector in areas where WASH services are poor.

### The challenge

**Sustainable WASH services in households and community, education and health-care facilities are vital for children's survival.** These services support children's physical development and nutrition. They enable them to attend school and focus on learning. And they improve livelihood opportunities for communities, protecting children from the risks of child marriage and child labour.

**Drinking water services are not safe or affordable for far too many people.** Despite the progress made in improving access to water in recent decades, there are still 1.42 billion people – including 450 million children – who live in areas of high or extremely high water vulnerability.<sup>27</sup> For instance, more than 2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water at home, and 144 million still use untreated and unsafe surface water for drinking.<sup>28</sup> Historic droughts in the Horn of Africa alone left at least

10 million children facing dire water shortages and on the brink of famine.<sup>29</sup> Where access to water is particularly challenging, communities may be forced to rely on the most expensive and unsustainable options, such as water trucking, with associated cost and quality concerns. Water insecurity can also be a source of conflict, and the two can create a vicious circle when water is scarce. Once conflicts have begun, they can shift patterns of water use, as populations are displaced and move to new locations. This can strain limited resources and escalate tensions, leading to a cycle of further conflict.

In 2021, 3.85 billion people lacked access to safely managed **sanitation services**.<sup>30</sup> Services that are not climate resilient threaten the progress made in water and sanitation over decades and are a risk to water quality. Globally, millions of girls and women still lack adequate facilities for menstrual hygiene management.

### What UNICEF will deliver

Along with our partners, we will deliver a targeted set of interventions to accelerate access to sustainable WASH services. These interventions are grouped into two packages that work together:

- i     **A 'catalytic' package designed to unlock climate finance opportunities for governments.** We will support their efforts to conduct feasibility studies and assessments to develop proposals for climate finance. This research will help them secure the large-scale funding needed to provide climate-resilient water supplies. This work includes:
  - a. Identifying the most promising opportunities for financing climate-resilient and accessible WASH services in the country

- b. Supporting the government with a preliminary assessment of the viability of the portfolio of WASH projects in the country and developing investment-ready finance options, including project feasibility analyses, an assessment of gender impacts, and detailed economic and financial analyses
- c. Strengthening the ability of the government to develop proposals from these options by providing co-funding from other instruments, such as private sector partnerships

- ii A 'scaling-up' package that aims to provide climate-resilient WASH services to those without access and upgrade existing WASH services** so that they are resilient to the effects of climate change. Activities in this package include:
- a. Identifying communities in priority countries where access to WASH services is most at risk from the impacts of climate change
  - b. Supporting WASH partners in priority communities with technical options and designs for interventions that consider climate risks, are accessible and are tailored to the local context, such as elevating water points, providing gender-responsive and inclusive latrines and handwashing stations, and designing boreholes and rainwater harvesting systems that meet local needs
  - c. Providing communities and partners with a service delivery model to sustain the interventions. The interventions will be tailored to the local context and may include training local community members on monitoring water quality and maintaining and operating the WASH infrastructure. This may also include establishing partnerships with community members and with local government authorities and other stakeholders so that WASH systems remain sustainable and well maintained over time.

**To make these packages a reality, we need a SHIFT in WASH programming.\*** This will be built on the investment that UNICEF and its partners have already made in a country's first step towards ensuring climate-resilient WASH services by supporting governments with initial climate risk analysis and testing potential climate-resilient solutions.

### Planned results

By 2025:

- ➡ Accelerated global partnerships to mobilize climate finance in the WASH sector

By 2030:

- ➡ All children have universal and equitable access to safe and sustainable drinking water
- ➡ All children have access to sustainable, adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene

### Pathways for young people to be more effective champions for sustainability

**UNICEF recognizes that young people have a critical role to play in the transition to a more sustainable future.** By taking practical environmental action and

developing green and transferable skills, they will benefit themselves and their communities and the planet as a whole.

### The challenge

Children and youth are passionate about environmental issues, biodiversity loss and climate change. In a 2021 survey of 16- to 25-year-olds in 10 countries, nearly 60 per cent of those approached reported feeling very worried or extremely worried, while more than 45 per cent said feelings about the climate affected their daily lives.<sup>31</sup> Children feel frustrated at this inter-generational

form of injustice but are willing to challenge the status quo. However, they are not engaged enough. While NAPs sometimes refer to children and youth, substantial progress is required to recognize children and young people as rights holders and agents of change rather than as passive victims, and to embed child- and youth-responsive measures.

\* As part of the mainstreaming component, UNICEF commits to strengthening climate-resilient WASH programmes in 65 priority countries.

## What UNICEF will deliver

**Work with young people and its partners to mobilize millions of young people worldwide to take concrete sustainability and climate action to increase the resilience of their communities.**

To achieve this, the UNICEF strategy will focus on three key imperatives: education, action and advocacy illustrated in this plan under Objective 2.

## Planned results

By 2025:

- ↳ Learning assets on climate change awareness and green skills are made available to every child and young person, including through digital education and low-tech approaches
- ↳ Reduced gender gap in participation in green skilling and the transition to green jobs
- ↳ Children and young people engaged in sustainability and climate action
- ↳ Global acceleration of the implementation of the CSSF

By 2030:

- ↳ Every country has strengthened its systems-level resilience, upskilled its teaching workforce and engaged in risk-informed sector planning
- ↳ Every country has a programme for young people to take action on climate change, maximizing existing platforms and initiatives
- ↳ Every government formally includes young people in its intergovernmental negotiation bodies
- ↳ All children have the opportunity to engage in sustainability and climate learning, action or advocacy

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"If we don't fight for climate justice, we will be more and more affected by it." – Tainara (centre), an Indigenous activist from the Omágua Kambeba People. UNICEF invited her to COP 27 in 2022 to represent Brazilian youth.





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In 2021, a migrant pregnant woman is emergency evacuated from an Indigenous community in Panama to reach a Migrant Station, where UNICEF and partners provide maternal health care. Climate impacts and disasters are fueling increasingly risky human migration as individuals and families search for better places to live.

## Conclusion

The road map to a sustainable future for children demonstrates that taking action on the planetary crisis need not come at the expense of protecting and expanding child development gains. Both can – and should – happen together.

Placing children at the centre of the world's response to the planetary crisis has the potential to provide the critical watershed moment that will drive action to protect the health and well-being of children and lead to stronger communities and more resilient and inclusive economies.

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Wherever he lives.

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A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

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The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.



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