

POLICY AND ADVOCACY BRIEF: COP26

The climate crisis

The new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) highlights the stark reality of the climate crisis that those on the frontline have been facing for years. Extreme weather events and other climate change-related impacts will continue to have catastrophic impacts on these communities for decades to come unless urgent action is taken to stay below the Paris Agreement's target of 1.5 degrees warming.

Since the industrial revolution, human activity, through the burning of fossil fuels, has already warmed the world by 1.1 degrees at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2,000 years with atmospheric CO₂ concentrations higher than at any time in at least 2 million yearsⁱ. If greenhouse gas emissions are not dramatically reduced, the 1.5-degree warming will be reached by 2040ⁱⁱ. Early industrialisation, colonisation, and wealth inequality mean some countries have and continue to contribute to global emissions significantly more than others. Between 1990 and 2015, the richest 1 percent of the world's population were responsible for more than twice as much carbon pollution as the poorest 50 percent or 3.1 billion peopleⁱⁱⁱ.

We continue to witness the wide-ranging impacts of human activity on the climate. Temperatures are reaching record levels, food insecurity is widespread and severe, wildfires have destroyed entire forests and community infrastructure across multiple countries and regions, sea levels have risen, and extreme weather events have occurred almost simultaneously within countries with severe flooding following periods of drought. Approximately 1 billion children live in extremely high-risk countries facing a deadly combination of exposure to multiple climate and environmental shocks with a high vulnerability due to inadequate essential services^{iv} and wider climate resilience measures. Extreme weather events and climate variability are also increasingly forcing people to leave their homes, with 9.8 million children and youth affected by weather-related internal displacement in 2020^v. Security of livelihoods in many countries is also significantly impacted by the declining availability and quality of natural resources, on which we all depend.

These impacts are being felt most severely by the poorest and most marginalised, those who have contributed the least to the crisis. For instance, while Africa emits less than 4% of greenhouse gases, the continent suffers from significant effects, such as drought in the Sahel, floods, and cyclones, contributing to the current food crisis. Climate justice must therefore be at the heart of climate action in order to address the inequity between those responsible for emissions and those most impacted.

Impacts on girls' rights

Discriminatory social and gender norms mean that girls and women, as well as those marginalized by race, sexuality, gender identity, disability, ethnicity, economic status, are often more affected by climate impacts and have the fewest resources to cope. Indigenous women, who are often forced to defend their territories, resources and rights from extractive industries, face intersecting and reinforcing forms of gender-based and other violence that are a result of racism, socio-economic and political marginalisation.^{vi} The climate crisis poses a gender, social, intergenerational and racial injustice, deepening existing inequalities and rolling back progress made on human rights and social justice.

Climate impacts routinely place girls, especially during adolescence, at increased risk of human trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and disruption in access to sexual and reproductive health services and maternal and postnatal care. It can also contribute to increases in harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage due to the growing impoverishment of communities. Adolescent girls, particularly in the most affected countries, face being pulled out-of-school to help alleviate the additional domestic and economic burdens that are shouldered by women in households facing climate-related shocks and stress. In Kiribati in the Pacific, for example, girls are already being pulled out of school to help rebuild homes, toilets and other community infrastructure when the sea walls are breached.

This is particularly concerning as out-of-school girls are less likely to return to school, particularly once married, pregnant or having become a mother, potentially resulting in them having less access to the information and skills needed to respond to the impacts and contribute to community-based adaptation efforts and the green economy. Girls also face increased risk of child, early and forced marriage and unions and unintended and/or unwanted adolescent pregnancy, as families consider the financial burdens and safety concerns created by climate shocks and stresses and struggle to feed their families. This can direct girls into a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty, vulnerability, and further marginalisation.

Adaptation and resilience strategies are key to dealing with the unavoidable impacts of the climate crisis, as long as they are informed by affected communities, indigenous people and marginalised groups, and where appropriate, delivered by them.

Those making the largest contributions to the cause of the crisis must therefore take urgent action to reduce emissions and financially support those most affected. Crucially, girls and women must be meaningfully engaged in and central to all decision making on tackling climate change. This involves recognising their experiences and expertise, supporting their leadership and financing and implementing their ideas and solutions. This is important across all aspects of climate action, from reducing greenhouse gas emissions, transitioning to a green economy, adaptation and influencing policy processes. Without girls and women, the outcome of these actions will only be half as successful.

The role of education

If current trends continue, by 2025 climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls each year from completing their education.^{vii} This will further entrench gender gaps in education and undermine girls' ability to adapt to climate impacts, which can prevent them from gaining the necessary knowledge and skills for community-based adaptation, disaster risk resilience, climate activism and future secure livelihoods. In a recent report by Plan International, the majority of 15–24 year-olds said that their teachers had taught them about the impacts of climate change. Yet only 22% had been taught about climate change policies or frameworks, and only 11% had been taught how to participate in formal climate change policy decision-making processes.^{viii}

Education is a crucial pathway to support and enable adaptive capacities, pro-environmental behaviours and girls' and women's leadership. Twelve years of quality, transformative education can equip girls with the skills and knowledge needed to tackle the climate crisis, claim and exercise their rights, and empower them to be leaders and decision-makers, challenging the systems and norms which reinforce gender and climate injustice around the world.

This requires taking steps to reform both the content that is currently being taught in schools, and the ways in which children and young people learn. Education systems should enable learners to develop green and life skills, support critical thinking and build confidence, including through civic engagement that advances justice and equality and empowers young people to hold decision makers to account and engage in climate processes. This must go hand in hand with strengthening the resilience of education systems and efforts to remove the barriers to girls' education, to ensure continuous access during crises and disruption, particularly for the most marginalized.

The opportunity at COP26

COP26 presents an opportunity to ensure gender transformative education is recognised as crucial in driving climate justice, building on the ambitious commitments made through the G7 Girls' Education Declaration and the Global Education Summit earlier this year. The review and enhancement of the Doha Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) at COP26 must be made more progressive, gender transformative and responsive to the rallying cries from young people from around the world, who are demanding quality climate education and meaningful inclusion in climate decision making. Commitments should be supported by concrete action, scaled up over the next five years and include clear accountability mechanisms.

With so much at stake for people and planet, COP26 must recognise the transformative power of education to advance gender, racial, intergenerational and climate justice for a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world. This requires leaders to take concrete steps to finance and implement a gender transformative education that enables children and future generations to adapt and respond to the increased impacts of climate change, while also contributing to mitigation efforts and charting the world on a course to achieve the 1.5. degree Celsius target.

This COP must deliver concrete actions, not empty promises. We cannot expect one conference to solve everything, but we also know we cannot wait. Leaders must maximise coming together in person at COP26, the first time in 2 years, to finalise the rulebook of the Paris Agreement, raise their collective ambition to reduce emissions, address loss and damage, commit new and additional finance, and centre those most affected in all decisions and discussions.

Now is the chance to work together with young people to prioritise and implement a green recovery from Covid-19, invest in transformative climate action and education and protect our planet for today's children and all future generations.

Plan International's Calls to Action

At a glance

- 1) Raise **ambition** on emission reductions and finance
- 2) Invest in **education**
- 3) Meaningfully **engage young people**
- 4) Prioritise **gender** in all UNFCCC processes and uphold the Gender Action

1) Raise ambition on emission reductions and finance



Aligned with the recommendations in the Glasgow Action Plan 2021^{ix}, we are calling for leaders to raise ambitions on emissions reductions and climate financing:

Keep warming to below 1.5 degrees

- Urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep warming to under 1.5 degrees compared to pre-Industrial times. Countries must close the gap between what NDCs and Long-term Strategies (LTS) are currently delivering and what climate science demands, with every country, particularly those with the greatest historical and current responsibility, continually raising their ambitions to reduce emissions.

Increase climate finance, specifically for adaptation and loss and damage

- Urgently increase climate finance to at least the committed \$100 billion/year, ensuring 50% is for adaptation and resilience in climate vulnerable countries. Increase climate finance commitments beyond \$100 billion/year from 2025.
 - Scale up funding for locally-led adaptation that strengthens the decision-making power of, and direct implementation by, affected people and communities and upholds human rights. Countries should commit to and implement the principles for locally led adaptation action^x.
 - Funding must be *accessible* and *responsive* to the needs and rights of girls and women, children and youth, indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups.
 - Fund anticipatory action and preparedness, based on early warning indicators, where appropriate using forecast based financing. Adequate, timely and flexible funding must be made available to support interventions to prevent and mitigate the impacts of foreseen climate shocks. This approach should particularly be applied to social sectors such as education and protection to ensure continuous access to services.
 - Increase investment in resilience, including alternative livelihoods and shock responsive, flexible social protection systems. Ensure that life-saving assistance to meet humanitarian needs is coordinated with and complementary to addressing drivers of vulnerability and that all long-term development funding includes provisions that can enable early action.
- Scale up new and additional climate finance and Official Development Assistance (ODA) to address loss and damage and acknowledge it as the third pillar of climate action on a par with mitigation and adaptation

2) Invest in education

Together with partners Transform Education, and aligned with the youth-led recommendations on gender-transformative climate education, we are calling on leaders to:

- Develop national climate learning strategies that are gender transformative and recognise the importance of youth leadership by prioritising civic engagement, green skills, rights, life skills, policy processes and activism, and ensure that girls and young women are meaningfully engaged in the development of these strategies
- Recognise and embed these climate learning strategies in climate financing, policies, and agreements, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)

- Strengthen education systems to be more resilient and gender transformative as part of adaptation strategies in NDCs. The Comprehensive School Safety Framework^{xi} outlines three key approaches to support this.
- Reach an agreement for an enhanced Doha Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) that is gender transformative and aligned to the Lima Work Programme on gender and SDG4.7. Specifically, one that:
 - Recognises the disproportionate impact of climate change on girls' education with key actions to support girls' access to quality education
 - Recognises the power of gender transformative education as a key pathway to climate justice
 - Takes a holistic view of climate education that includes civic engagement, green skills, rights, life skills, policy processes and activism

3) Meaningfully engage young people

We are calling on leaders to:

- Implement the youth-led proposals put forward in the [MOCK COP26 Treaty](#) and following the Youth4Climate summit, and sign up to the [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#)
- Ensure that young people, particularly girls and young women, are meaningfully included in the development, review, implementation and monitoring of all climate policies, including those on climate education
- Ensure that young people, particularly girls and young women, are included in official national delegations and are given the space and opportunities to participate in COPs and related climate processes
 - Ensure young people, particularly adolescent girls and young women are meaningfully engaging in all aspects of the COP including national briefings, meetings, panels, high-level processes, and are able to observe relevant negotiations
 - Create an enabling environment for young people's engagement where their views and recommendations are respected, valued and they have a real opportunity to influence decision making.
 - Support young people with issues related to passports, travel visas, and other travel restrictions.
 - Encourage opportunities for engaging in climate processes through formal and informal channels such as schools, school clubs and social media.
 - Develop and implement safeguarding principles for safe engagement
- Include in the Doha Work Programme on ACE a decision to convene an in-session workshop during the mid-year's sessions of the subsidiary bodies in 2022 on children and young people's participation in climate action

4) Prioritise gender in all UNFCCC processes and uphold Gender Action Plan

- Be accountable to and implement the commitments made in the Gender Action Plan at COP25 and nominate national gender focal points to support this
 - Centre girls in policies and processes for gender-just climate action and decision making
 - Meaningfully engage girls and women in policies and in adaptation, resilience and ecosystem-based approaches



- Support gender balance, participation and girls' and women's leadership in UNFCCC processes

ⁱ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis (2021)

ⁱⁱ ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Oxfam (2020) Confronting carbon inequality

^{iv} UNICEF (2021) The climate crisis is a child rights crisis

^v UNICEF UK (2021) Futures at Risks: Protecting the Rights of Children on the Move in a Changing Climate

^{vi} IUCN <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-002-En.pdf>

^{vii} Malala Fund (2021) A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls' education

^{viii} [Reimagining climate education and youth leadership | Plan International \(plan-international.org\)](https://www.plan-international.org)

^{ix} Glasgow Action Plan (2021) https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/can-uk_tcc_bond_glasgow_action_plan_2021.pdf

^x IIED <https://www.iied.org/principles-for-locally-led-adaptation>

^{xi} GADRRRES <https://gadrrres.net/what-we-do/gadrrres-global-activities/comprehensive-school-safety-framework>