



# Young Children & Climate Change

Most Vulnerable to Most Valuable

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**Policies and programs on Early Childhood Development (ECD)** provide a cost-effective, comprehensive, immediate, and enduring path to achieving Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development.

Young children are the **most vulnerable** to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. But they are also our most valuable asset to fight against it. ECD policies and programs are our **most valuable** tools:

- To build **climate resilience** and adaptive capacities of young children and families.
- To boost the implementation and attainment of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while enhancing **climate mitigation**.

## Unequal Burden on Young Children<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 90% of the global health burden related to climate change is borne by children under five. More than 1.7 million premature deaths among children under five are caused by pollution and toxic substances annually. Young children are disproportionately affected by climate change across all nurturing care components.



**The Sustainable Development Goals recognize that early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years.**

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon (2015)

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### Health

- 17 million babies under the age of 1 breathe toxic air. 12 million live in South Asia.
- Almost 1/2 of the world's children exposed to lead poisoning live in South Asia.



### Nutrition

- 500 million children live in flood prone areas. 920 million children are exposed to water scarcity. Nearly 40% of people living in high or extremely high drought areas live in Asia. 90% of global flooding occur in South and Southeast Asia.



### Safety & Security

- Children in 6 Asia Pacific countries are at extremely high risk from climate change.
- 90% Pacific islanders, excluding Papua New Guinea, live by the coastline.



### Early Learning

- 1 in 3 children live in countries that face extreme high temperatures. Extreme weather and disaster events can prevent children from accessing schools and learning services.



### Responsive Caregiving

- Climate change significantly affects children's mental health and wellbeing. The stress and trauma are likely to disrupt the way a child and caregiver interacts.
- Instability associated with displacement from severe or chronic disasters presents challenges to responsive caregiving.



Scoping Study

## Most Vulnerable to Most Valuable

1. The pioneering scoping study by ARNEC and partners called for an ECD-focused approach to climate change adaptation. It highlights the need to understand distinctive needs of young children at different stages of development.
2. We need to take actions and pathways to build resilience at multiple levels: home, communities, schools and early childhood education settings, and ECD services, programs and policies.
3. The opportunities for change to transform our most vulnerable to most valuable are through policies that put young children at the heart of climate actions and environmental protection - and adequate, equitable financing for the early years.
4. Climate change undermines all nurturing care areas affecting young children, caregivers, families, and their abilities to survive and thrive. Young children who have emitted the least amount of greenhouse gases are paying the heaviest price.

## Framework for Action

Advancing the ECD and Climate Change agenda requires collective efforts to enhance awareness of the need to protect the rights of young children; amplify their voice on the impacts of climate change on their health, well-being, and development; and bring ECD to the forefront of the fight against climate change and in the achievement of sustainable developments. We envision a Global ECD and Climate Change Initiative<sub>2</sub> for stronger and greater collective action driven by a worldwide coalition to address inequities early on and in response to the climate crisis, as this affects young children.



1. Source: ARNEC, Save the Children, UNICEF EAPRO (2022). Most Vulnerable to Most Valuable: A Scoping Study to Put Young Children at the Heart of Climate Actions and Environmental Protection. 2. Building on the foundational work by ARNEC in partnership with UNICEF EAPRO and Save the Children.