



YOUTH RESEARCH UNIT

YouRu

***Code Red* for the Human and More-than-human**

**How Supranational Organisations
are Responding to Global Crises for
Young People and the Bio-sphere**

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Executive Summary

This report has been prepared to identify and highlight the ways in which a range of the most important intergovernmental or ‘supranational’ global organisations and agencies conceive of and imagine the ways *earth systems crises*, including those related to climate change and global capitalism, impact the lives and futures of children and young people.

There are around 1.8 billion young people aged between 10-24 in the world today. Roughly 90% live in developing nations. In these nations young people make up a significant portion of the population. The challenges and opportunities associated with a so-called *youth bulge* are widely studied.

All the while, young people in developing nations are impacted disproportionately by illness and disease, including mental illness, which are exacerbated by climate change and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts on young people are doubled in so far as climate inaction today greatly worsens the economic, social and health futures for young people, and the debts incurred in responding to COVID-19 will be predominantly paid for in the future.

It is not surprising then that inclusivity for young people is a major focus for many supranational organisations, or ‘development actors’ (Pezzini in OECDnetFWD, 2014: 3). These actors have sought to empower young people to play, and imagine, a role in a future that they have a stake in. In this context, children and young people find themselves at the ‘centre of movements demanding reform and pressing for change in their countries’ (OECDnetFWD, 2014: 9).

Children and young people face a range of challenges, including:

- lack of access to education;
- weak governance and questionable human rights records including in the West;
- marginalisation caused by a series of factors including generational wealth creation/loss;
- record levels of high under- and unemployment;
- extraordinarily high living costs particularly in housing, healthcare and education;
- the decline of industry;
- and the sometimes wilful destruction of the environment through climate change creating natural, social and economic damage that today’s children and young people will be asked to pay for.

With these and other challenges and opportunities in mind, many of the supranational organisations explored in this report, express concerns that a failure to adequately respond will produce and reproduce forms of *intergenerational injustice*.

These organisations also express concerns that intergenerational injustice, and the response that it produces, may worsen young people’s feelings of alienation and despair, leading to radicalised attitudes, discontent and a widespread proliferation of clinical levels of depression and anxiety alongside heavy use of medication, drugs and alcohol.

In outlining and detailing these sorts of concerns, many of these organisations suggest that with the right kind of action that supports children and young people with access to healthcare and education, ongoing training and support, ‘decent’ work, and opportunities for decisive action on climate change, today’s children and young people stand to become the generation that changes the future.

These are the hopes expressed by many of the supranational organisations explored in this report.

Structure of Report

Chapter 1, on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), discusses the IPCC Working Groups and how they have been directed towards mitigating the climate crisis with a focus on the health of children and young people.

Chapter 2 identifies how the United Nations (UN) and a number of its key agencies, including the Conference of the Parties (COP), the Conference of Youth (COY), UNESCO, UNICEF and the UNHCR, focus on issues of climate change and their impact on the health and well-being of children and young people.

Chapter 3 outlines how the World Health Organisation (WHO) – which itself is an agency of the UN – approaches the impact of climate change on the health of children and young people, especially in relation to mental health. The WHO has also played a significant role in attempting to address the worsening of young people’s health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 4 explores how the work of the World Bank imagines climate change’s impact on poverty and inequality. The World Bank believe that children must be afforded the best possible start in life in order for everybody to prosper. A core challenge for the World Bank in this context is the forced displacement of people as a direct result of climate change.

Chapter 5, on the World Economic Forum (WEF), outlines their work in partnership with organisations seeking mitigation and adaptation strategies for reducing climate change’s impact on children and young people, especially in relation to their health.

Chapter 6 examines how the Asian Development Bank (ADB) addresses poverty and economic development amidst the risks of climate change in the Asia Pacific region. Poverty, educational access and standards, and quality and affordable healthcare are all challenges made more difficult by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 7 provides an account of the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) concern with the links between failing to respond to climate change and worsening development and growth. The IMF offers policy advice to members on climate change mitigation and adaptation and how empowering women should be part of every nation’s development strategy.

Finally, Chapter 8 explores the concerns of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in relation to intergenerational justice especially in the context of climate change and the economy, youth empowerment, and the future of work and education. To this end, the OECD has a particular interest in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa).

In the Appendix, the report provides further details on, and access to, key documents, websites and information directly relevant to this report. They act as important supplements to the information provided.

Recommendations for working with this information

The information in this report is drawn from documents, research, reports and press releases issued by major supranational organisations that are key global actors in responding to global crises and their impact on children and young people.

Much of the information speaks directly to these issues, but at times their responses are more indirect. If we are too literal in our approach we risk missing vital work being done to improve the lives of children and young people.

So where the significant OECD report *Philanthropy and Youth Empowerment* (OECDnetFWD, 2014) directly explores how children and young people can be supported to respond to the threats to their futures posed by a whole series of crises, it may be less obvious on first appearances that the IMF's work on *Women's Empowerment* (see Chapter 7) is equally as significant. The IMF's research makes it clear that children and young people's health – as well as the health of nations – is directly connected to the well-being and empowerment of women.

In the introductions to each chapter, a brief recommendation for how to read the information on each supranational organisation is offered.

Finally, the report does not necessarily endorse the views, and/or work, and/or the 'track record' of many of these organisations in both contributing to, and then responding to, the crises that they identify. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank's roles in the so-called [Washington Consensus](#), and the World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual [Davos](#) gathering of 'capital' and its global political protectors, should raise, at the least, cautionary flags about the ways in which they and their partners imagine these problems, and develop policy framework responses to them.

Introduction

A Code Red?

In August 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres described the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group 1 (WG1) report as a 'code red for humanity':

The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse-gas emissions from fossil-fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk. Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible (UN, 2021).

The IPCC is the UN's body for 'assessing the science related to climate change'. It was created to provide governments and governing bodies with 'regular scientific assessments on climate change' and to 'put forward' possible strategies that if adopted would alleviate and mitigate the myriad disasters that may result from climate change (IPCC, 2022a). This effort is delivered across three working groups.

Hope remains that the worst consequences of the climate crisis can be prevented, but immediate action is required. If greenhouse gas emissions can peak by 2025, and then be halved by the end of this century, then there remains a reasonable chance that global temperature rises can be limited to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels (Harvey, 2022). But the risks of disaster related to climate change are not limited to changes in our physical environments. According to a 2021 World Health Organisation (WHO) survey, these risks are varied, and include:

- the mental health consequences of climate change that are felt unequally in poorer countries;
- the costs of climate change and the costs of inaction;
- the changing labour market;
- the changing nature of access to healthcare and education;
- the cost of living especially related to housing; and
- risks associated with decisions to birth, raise and care for the next generation.

All of these risks are more acutely experienced by children and young people in both poor and rich nations.

Until relatively recently, most of the governance structures for managing the crises impacting children and young people did little to understand them as different to adults. Many organisations that sought to address youth issues and implement youth programs had few staff whose work was focussed specifically on children and young people. But this is changing.

Many political, policy, economic, third sector and community organisations and leaders are expressing increased awareness of these challenges and have been working to address them in a multitude of ways as part of an acknowledgment that 'children and young people have been both dramatically underserved and unheard' (OECDnetFWD, 2014: 10).

Purpose

The purpose of this working paper is to map the narratives of supranational organisations in response to global crises and their impacts and consequences on children and young people. Many of these consequences are economic, financial, social, and health and well-being based and sit alongside, and in relation to, changes in the physical environment such as rising sea levels, heatwaves, bushfires and the proliferation of disease.

The starting point for this discussion is António Guterres' declaration of a *code red* based on the report from the IPCC's first working group. As such, the first chapter maps the narratives of the climate change crisis described by the IPCC. The second chapter maps the narratives of a number of other UN agencies including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF - now United Nations Children's Fund), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). While the IPCC works under the directives of the UN, their accounts, and the accounts of various UN organisations, of the climate change crisis emerge from differing contexts and associations.

Chapters three-through-eight map the narratives of the World Health Organization (WHO, another UN agency), the World Bank, the World Economic Forum (WEF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The stories told in these narratives are often bleak and are sometimes met with hostility and incredulity. However, they are stories that must be told in the hope that governments, supra-national and third sector organisations, businesses and communities can identify and develop ways to respond to crises like climate change – and the social, cultural, economic, political and ecological crises it emerges from and produces – in ways that sustain and enhance the lives and well-being of children, young people, older generations and the more-than-human organisms and elements of the bio-sphere.

Chapter 1: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Introduction

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an agency of the United Nations that is responsible for assessing the science of climate change.

The IPCC is currently in its 6th assessment cycle following from the 5th cycle which was completed in 2014. Most major reports will be released during the 6th cycle, including the Synthesis Report which is expected in late 2022 or early 2023. This report will synthesise the major findings of the three IPCC working groups in a 'non-technical style' that will allow for dissemination among a broad audience (IPCC, 2022b).

The IPCC working groups focus on distinct and overlapping issues relating to the impact and mitigation of climate change. Supranational organisations, the media, philanthropic and other grant offering groups, and environmentalists pay close attention to the work of the IPCC. A significant aspect of the IPCC's analysis relates to the possible future that children and young people will inherit.

Working Group 1 (WGI)

Explores the physical science basis for climate change. Their report was released in August 2021. The summary document is designed for policy makers and provides a 'high-level summary' of the current state of climate change from a scientific perspective drawing on dozens of experts from across the world (IPCC, 2021. See entry on WGI in Appendix).

Working Group 2 (WGII)

Explores climate change from the perspective of 'Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability'. WGII's focus is on 'ecosystems, biodiversity, and human communities', as well as human vulnerability and the 'capacities and limits of the natural world and human societies to adapt to climate change' (IPCC, 2022c). The WGII report was released in February 2022 and produced a summary document for policy makers (see entry on WGII in Appendix).

Working Group 3 (WGIII)

Focusses on mitigating climate change with a particular focus on the 'scientific, technological, environmental, economic and social aspects' of climate change mitigation (IPCC, 2022d: 8). The WGIII report was released in April 2022 alongside the policy summary document (see entry on WGIII in Appendix).

The IPCC publishes the answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the work of their working groups. FAQ 3 in response to the report for WGII asks '**How will climate change affect the lives of today's children tomorrow, if no immediate action is taken?**' (IPCC, n.d.). They provide an expansive answer that begins:

Climate change impacts are increasingly being felt in all regions of the world with growing challenges for water availability, food production and the livelihoods of millions of people. We also know that impacts will continue to increase if drastic cuts in greenhouse gas

emissions are further delayed – affecting the lives of today’s children tomorrow and those of their children much more than ours. But science is also clear: with immediate action now, drastic impacts can still be prevented (IPCC, n.d.).

The WGII report describes the consequences of climate change across three time periods - ‘the near-term (up to 2040), mid-term (2041-2060) and the long-term (2081-2100)’. Many children born in 2020 will live through these periods. Actions taken today to reduce emissions that trap heat in our atmosphere will significantly impact their futures in terms of health and well-being and security of food and water. This crisis will be experienced inter-generationally as the children of today birth and raise the children of tomorrow.

Without action, we can expect the situation for children and young people to worsen (see Box 1.1 Climate Crisis Impacts on Children and Young People).

Box 1.1 Climate Crisis Impacts on Children and Young People (IPCC, n.d.)

- children aged 10 or younger in 2022 will experience a four-fold increase in extreme weather events. People aged 55 or older in 2020 will not have these experiences;
- the percentage of people exposed to deadly heat exposure is expected to rise from 30% today to 48-76% by the end of the century;
- If the world warms by 4C by 2100, then the days when outdoor-based workers will be exposed to heat stress will increase to 250 workdays per year. This heat stress would occur in many of the world’s key food producing zones which would put strains on global food supply and costs.
- In Europe, heat stress would be experienced at two-to-threefold levels if global warming rises to 3C above pre-industrial levels.
- If global warming continues at present rates, children in South and Southeast Asia will see coastal communities disappear due to sea-level rises.
- By 2050 it is estimated that more than a billion people living in coastal cities will be at risk of displacement. Movement of these people to higher locations will increase competition for land and food and is likely to result in conflict in some of these areas.
- Water availability and quality will be dramatically affected. Water scarcity will impact up to 3 billion people at 2C warming. Children and young people in South America will face significant water scarcity since many depend on glacial water.
- Today’s children and young people will be impacted by food scarcity. The hotter it gets the more difficult food production, distribution, and storing will become. This will impact poorer nations the hardest.
- In Africa, where the world’s largest youth and child population lives, ‘severe stunting’ in growth and physical and cognitive development will occur as a result of malnutrition caused by climate change.

Conclusion

The IPCC suggests that these crises can be substantially mitigated with decisive action on greenhouse gas emissions and by 'strengthening our adaptation efforts' (IPCC, n.d.). Young people and children can play a central role in these efforts, and various youth organisations are already driving a wave of activity and awareness directed towards changing the situation.

Chapter 2: The United Nations (UN) and its Agencies

Introduction

This chapter describes the narratives created by the UN and its agencies on the global crises associated with climate change and its consequences. Included in the information are reports from UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR and the UN more generally.

Much of the information relates directly to climate change's impact on children and young people, but some is more indirect. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (see entry in Appendix), for example, have children front of mind yet are not always explicit in this regard since these goals are designed to meet the needs of all people. Similarly, women's empowerment should be central in any designed attempt to improve the lives of children whilst maintaining economic development.

Conference of the Parties (COP) and the United Nations Conference of Youth (COY)

Each year, the UN hosts the COP (Conference of the Parties) climate change conference that is attended by the signatories to UN climate change conventions (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC). As part of COP and the UNFCCC's operation, the UN supports the Conference of Youth (COY) run by the UN's climate change and youth organisation YOUNGO (The UNFCCC's constituency of youth non-governmental organisations. See Appendix entry on YOUNGO). The COY operates under four 'major components' (see Box 2.1 UN Conference of Youth Components).

Box 2.1 UN Conference of Youth (COY) Components (Source UN, n.d.)

1. The Policy document detailing the goal to bring representatives of the world's young people together to provide their voices to processes that influence intergovernmental climate change policies;
2. Capacity building;
3. Skill-building workshops; and
4. Cultural exchange.

In their efforts to achieve 'universal accessibility, true inclusion and diversity', YOUNGO runs several youth conferences (see Box 2.1 UN Global Youth Conferences).

Box 2.2 UN Global Youth Conferences

The **Global COY (GCOY)** is the largest UN youth conference on climate change. It is the official gathering of YOUNGO and occurs each year prior to COP at the same conference location. It is

viewed as preparation grounds for participants in GCOY to one day contribute to official COP proceedings.

The **Virtual COY (vCOY)** provides an online space for less privileged voices to be heard when they cannot physically attend COY events as a result of lack of funding for travel, visa issues, age, and environmental factors. vCOY 'ensures the voices of less privileged, vulnerable, marginalized, refugee and Indigenous groups' are accounted for and 'represented' (UN, n.d.).

Regional COYs (RCOY) and **Local COYs (LCOY)** occur before GCOY and COP to 'localize the climate conversation' to where it is most felt.

Young People, Gender and Climate Change

The United Nations Foundation has drawn attention to the impacts of climate change on gender inequality.

'Girls and women', Carbó (2022) argues, 'do not experience climate change in the same ways as boys and men'. In many parts of the world, girls and women are also locked out of positions of power for making decisions that mitigate the consequences of climate change. There are five key ways that climate change impacts the health and wellbeing of girls and women (see Box 2.3 Women, girls and climate change).

Box 2.3 Women, girls and climate change.

1. Girls and women face barriers when leaving areas impacted by climate change and natural disasters. Drawing on the World Bank's 2021 report, *Groundswell*, climate change will result in the displacement of 250 million people by 2050. Due to caregiving obligations to children and elderly, a burden carried particularly by women across the world, combined with fewer financial assets and fewer property rights, uprooting and moving can be a particular challenge. When girls and women are able to leave dangerous areas, they face a higher risk of unemployment, child marriage, human trafficking and violence in their new living arrangements.
2. Girls and women disproportionately suffer from illnesses that are impacted by climate change. Heat, humidity and rain create the ideal conditions for 'vector-borne' diseases like malaria, dengue fever, and Zika which all increase the risk of miscarriages, premature birth and anaemia in pregnant women. The IPCC WG1 report also emphasised that girls and women are at greater risk of food insecurity than boys and men, are more likely to die in extreme weather, and are more susceptible to mental health problems attributable to climate change (Carbó, 2022; IPCC, 2022).
3. Girls and women are more likely to be threatened for their roles in protecting the environment via assaults that include verbal abuse, intimidation, exclusion, sexual threats and abuse, and rape.
4. Girls and women are regularly excluded from decision-making processes in relation to climate change. Presently, men make up around 67% of the decision makers responsible for mitigating and preventing climate change. In formal national and international

negotiation bodies involved in climate change issues, women make up under 30% of participants.

5. Women- and girl-led climate change groups receive far less funding with only 3% of women-led environmental groups receiving philanthropic funding. Many girls and women's organisations are smaller scale, and major philanthropic organisations tend to fund environmental issues via large amounts of money paid to larger conglomerates.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

Among UNESCO's goals is to assist member states in mitigating and adapting to climate change and to monitor the impact of climate change in UNESCO designated sites such as World Heritage sites, biosphere reserves, and Geoparks.

UNESCO argues for education, awareness and training to create 'informed citizens', 'a knowledgeable workforce', and 'enlightened government officials' that will work together to address climate change and its consequences (UNESCO, 2017).

At UNESCO's 2017 General Conference on their strategy for action on climate change, a section of the proceedings were devoted to young people as actors 'in understanding and addressing climate change' (UNESCO, 2017: 12):

The environmental, social and economic consequences of climate change impact youth access to safe and adequate water and food, as well as to education, good health, housing, work and overall standard of living.

There are around 1.8 billion people aged between 10-24 in the world, representing the largest population of young people at any time in history. As detailed in the UNESCO *Operational Strategy on Youth* (2014-2021), young people are not only acutely impacted by the health consequences of climate change but are best placed to respond to mitigate its consequences.

In the context of this Operational Strategy, UNESCO supports the integration of sustainable development education into curricula as well as informal forms of education and lifelong learning with a focus on 'the key sustainable development challenges of climate change, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity' (UNESCO, 2014: 12).

Education about climate change, inside and outside of schools, is central to UNESCO's approach to mitigating climate change. UNESCO claims that education, especially for young people, empowers those who receive it by providing the 'knowledge, skills, values and attitudes' to be the 'agents of change' that the world requires (UNESCO, 2022a). From April to November 2022, in the lead up to the COP27 climate change conference, UNESCO will host a webinar series exploring 'Climate change education for social transformation' (UNESCO, 2022b).

In its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO partnered with the education sector through education ministries, private and public organisations, and 'civil society' groups to ensure effective learning is delivered to children and young people (UNESCO, 2021). Education is a vital 'public good' that should be delivered to everyone as our best hope in avoiding 'generational catastrophe and drive sustainable recovery' (UNESCO, 2021).

Among their initiatives is the [Global Education Coalition](#) as a model for effective partnering to develop educational strategies to withstand and respond to crises. It currently has 175 members operating in three related themes - 'gender, connectivity and teachers' (UNESCO, 2021).

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF works in partnerships with philanthropists throughout the world to provide children with life-saving help. UNICEF invests in partnerships that focus on innovative solutions which stand the best chance of forging meaningful change and 'create big impact' (UNICEF, n.d.a). Few subjects lie beyond these goals - everything from treating serious illness, providing healthcare to children living in remote locations, to enabling effective online learning when schools are not accessible.

UNICEF has forged an enduring collaboration with the WHO and *The Lancet* to form the [WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission](#), with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Commission aims to address a lack of action from the global community in securing the present and future health and well-being of the world's most vulnerable children. The initiative is headed by former New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark, who argues that:

Despite dramatic improvements in survival, nutrition, and education over recent decades, today's children face an uncertain future. Climate change, ecological degradation, migrating populations, conflict, pervasive inequalities, and predatory commercial practices threaten the health and future of children in every country (Clark et al., 2020).

Despite many of the world's countries agreeing in 2015 to a series of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – goals that included 'no poverty', 'zero hunger' and 'good health and well-being', and recognised that 'action in one area will affect outcomes in others' (UNDP, 2022) – limited progress has been made. Indeed, according to the joint report, *A Future for the World's Children?*, 'No single country is adequately protecting children's health, their environment and their futures' (WHO–UNICEF–Lancet, 2020).

In 2021, UNICEF began a collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank Group to create The Global Muslim Philanthropy Fund for Children (GMPFC) (UNICEF, n.d.b). The GMPFC is considered a unique platform since it caters to the various forms of Islamic philanthropy including *Zakat* and *Sadaqah* (see Box 2.4 Principles of Islamic Philanthropy).

Box 2.4 Principles of Islamic Philanthropy

Zakat - Almsgiving (providing money and food to poor people) is one of the five pillars of Islam, alongside prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and belief in Allah and His messenger, the Prophet (PBUH). Every able bodied, adult Muslim who owns a certain amount of wealth (nisab) has to give 2.5% as Zakat (Islamic Relief Australia, 2021).

Sadaqah - In its contemporary meaning, Sadaqah means charity given voluntarily. While Zakat is a precise amount that must be given in certain circumstances, Sadaqah is not subject to any limits and can take the form of money, acts of service, or even encouraging words (Zakat Foundation, 2022).

The GMPFC is specifically organised to harness the ‘true potential’ of Islamic giving and support humanitarian aid, especially for children, and work towards particular Sustainable Development Goals in the 57 member states in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (UNICEF, n.d.b). The Fund collects charitable giving from private and public organisations, Zakat agencies, companies, and individuals that seek to meet the ‘Islamic spirit of calling people to good’ and encourages Muslim philanthropists to join its emerging ‘coalition’ of Islamic givers.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR works to protect the rights, health and well-being of people who have been forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in another nation. They work with partners and in communities to ensure that ‘everybody has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another country’ and seek permanent solutions to the needs of displaced peoples (UNHCR, 2022).

The impact of climate change is central to the work of the UNHCR. A collaborative statement issued by UNHCR with UNICEF in 2020 draws attention to the impact of climate change on children and the challenges it poses for the work the organisations do:

As extreme weather events such as cyclones and heatwaves increase in frequency and ferocity, they threaten children’s lives and destroy infrastructure critical to their well-being. Floods compromise water and sanitation facilities, leading to diseases such as cholera, to which children are particularly vulnerable. Droughts and changing global rainfall patterns are leading to crop failures and rising food prices, causing food insecurity and nutritional deprivations that can have lifelong impacts. Today, around 500 million children live in areas with high risk of flooding, and nearly 160 million children live in areas of extreme or high risk of drought – these children are more vulnerable to climate shocks and displacement (UNHCR & UNICEF, 2020).

Conclusion

The UN and its various agencies play a central role in the world’s ability to respond to climate change. The UN also plays a central role in defining the climate change problem, its consequences, and the best strategies for adaptation and mitigation through the IPCC. Its agencies tackle the problem from the perspective of their core mission. The lives of children and young people are central in almost all approaches, often directly, sometimes via interceding strategies such as disease prevention, empowering women, and enhancing healthcare and education.

Chapter 3: The World Health Organisation (WHO)

Introduction

The WHO is an agency of the UN that carries out large scale research and partnerships on the global state of health and well-being, and many are focussed on children and young people. In particular, the WHO's work highlights the consequences of climate change for children and young people's health and well-being.

Whilst the WHO operates within the context of the UN, it requires separate treatment here owing to its global significance and vital role in maintaining the health and well-being of children and young people in changing climate and social systems.

Climate Change and Health

Box 3.1 outlines the 'key facts' emerging from the WHO's report into the connections between climate change and health.

Box 3.1 Impacts of Climate Change on Health (Source: WHO, 2021a)

- Climate change directly impacts environmental and social determinants of health and well-being including clean air, water that is safe to drink, food security and the availability of shelter;
- From 2030-2050 climate change is expected to contribute to 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and stress illnesses;
- The direct costs of this are expected to fall between \$USD 2-4 billion at 2030;
- Poorer nations with weak health care systems will be least able to respond, and;
- Reducing emissions of greenhouse gases now can greatly improve this situation (WHO, 2021a).

It is noteworthy that diseases like malaria have an acute impact on children and young people. In Africa, where most people who contract malaria live (in 2020 Africa was home to 95% of the world's malaria cases and 96% of malaria deaths), 80% of malaria deaths are in children under 5 (WHO, 2022a).

The WHO argues that climate change is the greatest threat to health facing humanity. Drawing on the work of the IPCC that argues that temperatures must not pass higher than 1.5C above pre-industrial global temperatures, the WHO (2021a) adds that 'every additional tenth of a degree of warming' will take a serious toll on people's health.

A 2022 WHO policy brief also highlights the mental health challenges posed by climate change and argues that mental health responses must be included in climate change planning. The current pace of climate change is expected to worsen a series of mental health challenges 'from emotional distress to anxiety, depression, grief, and suicidal behaviour' (WHO, 2022b).

The policy brief recommends:

- integrating climate change consequences into mental health planning;
- integrating mental health support with action on climate change;
- building upon already pursued commitments to improve mental health;
- developing community-based planning;
- and, importantly, closing the ‘funding gap’ that is a barrier to many people seeking psychosocial support.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO released their report for planning a ‘healthy and green’ recovery from the pandemic. This ‘manifesto’ provides ‘Prescriptions and Actionables’ for economic, social and human recovery and steps that will guard against the next, inevitable, pandemic:

Attempting to save money by neglecting environmental protection, emergency preparedness, health systems, and social safety nets, has proven to be a false economy – and the bill is now being paid many times over (WHO, 2020b).

WHO (2020b) recommends six prescriptions for rebuilding after the pandemic in economically sustainable ways that promote health and climate protection (see Box 3.2 Rebuilding beyond the Pandemic)

Box 3.2 Rebuilding beyond the Pandemic (Source: WHO, 2020b)

1. Protect and preserve the source of human health: Nature.
2. Invest in essential services, from water and sanitation to clean energy in healthcare facilities.
3. Ensure a quick and healthy energy transition since traditional energy production results in 90% of the planet breathing unhealthy air outdoors.
4. Promote healthy, sustainable food systems.
5. Build healthy, liveable cities instead of pollution factories.
6. Stop using taxpayers’ money to fund pollution.

For each prescription WHO offers a series of actionables (see Box 3.3 Actionables for Rebuilding beyond the Pandemic).

Box 3.3 Actionable for Rebuilding beyond the Pandemic (Source: WHO, 2020b)

- reducing subsidies for fossil fuels;
- offering tax exemptions for clean energy development;
- embedding health and environmental goals and benchmarks into COVID-19 financial recovery goals;
- promoting active and sustainable forms of mobility, and reducing reliance on cars and build this logic into urban design;
- promote and generate awareness that healthy foods are often the most environmentally sustainable;
- ensure water and food security;
- protect biodiversity understanding that it secures food chains and reduces the risks of non-human-to-human-animal disease transmission, and;
- create awareness that ‘participatory decision-making’ is often the way to achieve these goals (WHO, 2020b).

Conclusion

Climate change contributes to the prevalence of diseases, decreases the availability of food and water, and reduces the quality of air. These dangers particularly impact poor nations that do not possess the resources or infrastructure to respond effectively. Poorer nations often have larger populations of young people. The costs of responding to these risks will be borne by the children and young people of today. In this way, WHO’s work tracks a direct path from climate change, its impact on health, to its impact on children and young people.

Chapter 4: The World Bank

Introduction

The World Bank (2022a) considers ‘Climate change, poverty, and inequality’ to be among the defining issues of the twenty-first century. The World Bank Group is the largest ‘multilateral funder of climate investment in developing countries’. But no country is immune to climate change’s consequences. According to The World Bank’s research:

- Climate change drives the displacement of people and migration
- Impacts crop yields with consequences for food security
- Subsequent changes in agriculture, forestry and land use in response to this accounts for around 25% of greenhouse gas emissions, making the agriculture sector central to the climate change response
- Reducing emissions builds climate resilience but will require significant shifts in social, economic and technological practice.

The World Bank’s (2022a) strategy for addressing these challenges includes:

- Prioritising support for high emitting countries to transition to low-carbon strategies including halting new coal-based power production and decommissioning existing plants
- Supporting clean energy investment in poor countries to allow them to meet their energy needs without relying on high polluting infrastructure
- Since some climate consequences are now inevitable, all countries should invest in ‘adaptation and resilience’ where specialised local consequences can be mitigated.

The World Bank’s work is less directly aligned with understanding the impact of climate change on children and young people than other supranational organisations. Yet issues like climate change induced migration and displacement are most acutely felt in poorer nations with the highest percentages of children and young people. These nations are often less able to respond with adaptation and mitigation strategies. In this way, the dangers to children and young people of forced migration should be viewed among the most catastrophic impacts of climate change on their health and well-being.

The Early Years as a foundation for ‘Human Capital’

The World Bank (World Bank Group, 2022a) believes for people to reach their potential, and for a country to maximise its ‘human capital’, children need the ‘best possible start in life’.

The first five years of life are the fastest period of human growth and development as 90 percent of a person’s brain development occurs by the age of five. Investing in the early years helps to break the cycle of poverty, address inequality, and boost productivity.

But the World Bank's [Human Capital Index](#) shows that many children lack access to the healthcare and educational opportunities that give them the best opportunity to thrive as young adults. Due to 'inadequate nutrition', 'lack of early stimulation and learning', and 'exposure to poverty and stress' many children and young people globally face futures based on subsistence and poverty. COVID-19 has exacerbated this situation through reductions in support for mothers, an inability for children to receive timely immunisations, poverty and reduced nutritional intake, and worsening rates of violence targeting women and girls (World Bank Group, 2022a).

The World Bank (World Bank Group, 2022b) are committed in their belief that 'Investing in the early years is one of the smartest things a country can do to eliminate extreme poverty, boost shared prosperity, and create the human capital needed for economies to diversify and grow'. The experiences in early childhood, in particular, have a 'profound' impact on the development of the body and the mind which in turn impact learning, health, socialisation practices and – ultimately – 'productivity and income'.

Despite the significance of early childhood in a young person's development, increasing exposure to stress, lack of food and water, lack of stimulation, healthcare and educational opportunities undermines their development and the economic development of nations (World Bank Group, 2022b).

Groundswell: Climate change and 'forced migration'

In 2021, the World Bank released its updated instalment of the *Groundswell* report that details likely migration requirements if the worst impacts of climate change are unable to be mitigated (The World Bank, 2022b). By as early as 2030, climate change may induce the migration of 216 million people in six world regions – Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, North Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

But if climate change can be mitigated in the next eight years it may be possible, according to the *Groundswell* reports, to reduce this migration by up to 80%. According to Vice President of Sustainable Development at the World Bank, Juergen Voegelé:

The *Groundswell* report is a stark reminder of the human toll of climate change, particularly on the world's poorest – those who are contributing the least to its causes. It also clearly lays out a path for countries to address some of the key factors that are causing climate-driven migration ... All these issues are fundamentally connected which is why our support to countries is positioned to deliver on climate and development objectives together while building a more sustainable, safe and resilient future (in The World Bank, 2022b).

In part 1 of the *Groundswell* report, 'Preparing for Internal Migration', the authors explore 'How slow-onset climate change impacts population dynamics, and development contexts shape mobility trends' (World Bank Group, 2022c). In part 1, the report:

- Showcases research and analysis of internal, climate change based, migration for Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America, East Asia and the Pacific, North Africa and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.
- Provides a picture of the scale of internal climate migration across these regions.

- Allows for interpretation and understanding of how slow-onset climate change has incredible consequences for ‘population dynamics’ and how ‘development contexts shape mobility trends’ (World Bank Group, 2022c).
- Highlights the steps needed moving forward to meet the challenges posed by slow-onset climate change and to reach Sustainable Development Goals.

In part 2, ‘Acting on Internal Climate Migration’, the authors examine the action needed to ‘reduce global emissions, and support green, inclusive, and resilient development’ (World Bank Group, 2022d):

- Provides projections and research of internal climate migration in three regions – East Asia and the Pacific, North Africa, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
- Argues that climate migration hotspots may emerge by 2030 that will spread and intensify up to 2050.
- Concludes that ‘rapid and concerted’ action is needed to reduce emissions, support green initiatives, resilient development, and reduce the scale of internal climate migration (World Bank Group, 2022d).

Countries and regions that accept displaced arrivals are taking the lead, with the support of The World Bank, to manage these crises by providing health and education systems for children and young people in displaced communities. These efforts have been aligned with the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) led by UNHCR (World Bank Group, 2022e).

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the dynamics of displacement. In some instances, displaced people were forced to take more precarious routes with people attempting the North Africa to Europe sea route tripling in 2020 (World Bank Group, 2022f). Meanwhile, traditional migration routes used for labour, social and economic movement were significantly disrupted.

Conclusion

The World Bank strongly believes that people’s lives are intimately connected to their development in their early years. This, combined with dangerous displacement events and patterns that are caused and worsened by climate change and crises like COVID-19, positions children and young people in the firing lines of the global calamities that threaten the world and its human and more-than-human denizens.

Chapter 5: The World Economic Forum (WEF)

Introduction

The [World Economic Forum \(WEF\)](#) was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It claims to engage ‘the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas’, and ‘strives in all its efforts to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest’ (WEF, 2022a).

The WEF seeks to work in support of a world where global warming is limited to 1.5C degrees above pre-industrial levels, thereby avoiding the worst catastrophic consequences of climate change. They partner with world leaders to improve commitments to action on climate change, with organisations to develop private initiatives, and resource and support innovative solutions to complicated problems (WEF, 2022b).

The WEF’s work focuses on children and young people in a number of ways. In the examples that follow organisations and people who received support from WEF are highlighted. These groups do meaningful work addressing climate change and its health impacts on children and young people.

Climate change most impacts children and young people

Box 5.1: *Save the Children International* and their approach to climate change

- The climate crisis is a child-rights crisis.
- The adverse weather events caused by a warming planet affect children first and worst.
- Children born in 2020 will be harder hit by the climate crisis in their lifetime than their grandparents
 - Inger Ashing (2021), CEO of *Save the Children International*.

Climate change continues to have an incredible impact. It is, in the view of Inger Ashing who is CEO of *Save the Children International*, a child and young people’s rights crisis. Climate change impacts children and young people ‘first and worst’ and deepens inequalities ‘across borders and generations’ (Ashing, 2021).

The world’s young people have ‘inherited a problem that is not of their making’ (Ashing, 2021). A child born in 2020, in comparison to a person born in 1960, will experience across their lifetime:

- twice as many wildfires
- 2.8 times the crop failures
- 2.6 times as many droughts
- 2.8 times the flooding, and
- 6.8 times more heatwaves

Low- and middle-income nations (that have least contributed to climate change) will bear the heaviest costs. For the world's most vulnerable children, climate change will have its greatest impact when combined with already existing inequality, conflict, and other natural hazards. These children and young people will have more difficulty accessing education and healthcare and their vulnerability worsens.

Healthcare's climate action roadmap

Box 5.2: *Healthcare Without Harm* and their approach to climate change

- The healthcare sector contributes more than 4.4% of net global greenhouse gas emissions.
- [Global Road Map for Health Care Decarbonization](#), outlines actions to reduce the sector's global emissions and provide healthcare recommendations.
- Commitment is needed from healthcare institutions and governments around the world.
 - Gonzalo Muñoz and Josh Karliner, *Healthcare Without Harm*

When required, the healthcare industry can be called on and expected to act 'heroically'. This has been on display since early 2020 as first responders, care givers, and health care professionals of various kinds work as, nothing less than, the anchors of resilience in communities beset by the pandemic (Muñoz & Karliner, 2021).

But the climate crisis threatens to make the crisis of COVID-19 'pale' in comparison. The health and well-being of everyone is potentially threatened indefinitely by the damage it may cause. And the healthcare sector is aware of a major dilemma:

Ironically, healthcare, whose mission it is to heal, is a major contributor to this crisis that is making the planet and the people who inhabit it sick. Healthcare contributes more than [4.4%](#) of net global greenhouse gas emissions, making the sector (if it were a country) the fifth largest climate polluter on the planet (Muñoz & Karliner, 2021).

This paradox requires a careful response as health care organisations across the world become aware of what is required to change practices to reduce the impact on the environment.

Conclusion

The WEF emphasises that children and young people are acutely affected by the consequences and impacts of climate change. Among their goals is the achievement of 'net-zero' which is only possible, in their view, with 'public-private cooperation' (WEF, 2022c). They seek to achieve this with three programs;

1. raising the ambitions of governments to seek deeper investment in preventing climate change
2. 'catalyzing transformation' where public-private partnerships are leveraged to turn ambition into action, and

3. 'enabling motivation' by providing a 'platform' for 'innovators and changemakers' to develop the solutions (WEF, 2022c).

The WEF's work reveals the complexity of mitigating and adapting to climate change. Any vital work towards improving the lives of children and young people must be accompanied by broader strategies for mitigation and adaption including reducing global greenhouse gas emissions and preventing temperatures from rising to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

Chapter 6: The Asian Development Bank

Introduction

The [Asian Development Bank \(ADB\)](#) was ‘conceived in the early 1960s as a financial institution that would be Asian in character and foster economic growth and cooperation in one of the poorest regions in the world’. The ADB ‘envision[s] a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty in the region’. Whilst these efforts have been addressed successfully in a variety of ways, the Asia Pacific still experiences widespread poverty with ‘263 million living on less than \$1.90 a day and 1.1 billion on less than \$3.20 a day’ (ADB, 2022a).

Development issues in Asia and the Pacific

The ADB works toward addressing development issues in their region. These issues – which include climate change, security of water and food, improving inequality, inadequate education and poverty – require coordinated international responses. ADB seeks to invest in its member countries to empower people to respond to these challenges and promote sustainable development, and advance social progress, whilst achieving environmental harmony alongside economic growth (ADB, 2022b).

Among the key development issues that the ADB addresses in its region are: climate change and disaster risk management, education, and health.

Climate change

The ADB established the Climate Change Fund (CCF) in 2008 to encourage investment in developing countries to assist in addressing the ‘causes and consequences of climate change’, and to assist nations in building and developing climate and disaster resilience, and improving sustainability (ADB, 2022c).

ADB provides funds and resources with grants, technical support, loans, and via direct charge with three goals as the priority:

1. adaptation
2. clean energy development, and
3. reduce emissions caused by deforestation and degradation, and ineffective land management (ADB, 2022c).

The ADB’s programs seek to enhance climate action whilst specifically supporting projects and programs for healthcare and education in its member countries.

The ADB’s priorities for responding to the climate risks posed to Asia and the Pacific include building resilience in the face of climate change, as well as disaster management strategies and low-carbon development (ABD, 2022d).

Box 6.1: Strategy 2030 Operational Priority 3

In the face of rapidly growing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, increasing impact from climate change and disasters, and ongoing environmental damage, ADB has placed combating climate change and its consequences at the top of its development agenda. In September 2019, the bank adopted [Strategy 2030 Operational Priority 3: Tackling Climate Change, Building Climate and Disaster Resilience, and Enhancing Environmental Sustainability](#).

Most importantly, ADB recognises the incredible impact of disasters related to climate change on poor, marginalised, and vulnerable people. The ADB developed the [Revised Disaster and Emergency Assistance Policy \(DEAP\)](#) in October 2021 in response to these challenges combined with a commitment to increase support in member countries to improve resilience in the face of climate risk and emergencies. ADB is investing in:

- water supply management
- irrigation technology
- flood control
- transport infrastructure
- energy infrastructure
- health
- education

The Bank is forming partnerships in vulnerable locations to action these ‘ambitious’ strategies and improve resilience across the region (ADB, 2022d).

Education

ADB works in their region to promote equality and accessibility in education for all as the highest priority in forging sustainable development. Over 50 years, ADB has worked towards these goals committing \$15 billion in grants and loans during this period.

The Asia Pacific region is, incredibly, home to just under 4.5 billion people requiring massive resources be devoted to facilitating education access:

But the quality of education, particularly the attainment of learning outcomes, remains a challenge. There is a growing consensus among ADB, its developing member countries (DMCs), and development partners, that countries must reach and maintain a critical level of basic skills for societies to have the social and economic means to grow and prosper. The bank works to strengthen the education systems of its DMCs, to help them compete in the global economy (ADB, 2022e).

Quality education, offered and available to all, occurs as a product of ‘expanded post-primary education’, teacher training, and training in vital skills and expertise. These, in turn, rest on strong primary and pre-primary education foundations. Each element of this educational picture requires adequate funding. Since 2018, 90% of children in the Asia Pacific now enrol in primary school. These are steep improvements from estimates from the 1970s where only 1 in 3 children attended

schooling. ADB continues to support ongoing educational efforts with the belief that prosperity, health and well-being will flow from educational foundations.

Health

ADB works closely with governments of member states to achieve ‘universal health coverage’ in the Asia Pacific. They support projects that improve health services, helping them to reach more people in efficient, accessible and equitable ways. This can be achieved via public-private collaborations that promote well-being across the lifespan with priority given to women, children and the elderly where the ‘greatest economic returns’ can be realised (ADB, 2022f). Prior to setbacks related to the pandemic, the region had made substantial progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 3; ‘ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all ages’.

Conclusion

ADB’s role in the Asia Pacific region is substantial and they tackle major issues with broad implications. Their work is an example of the need to address both broad and more narrow concerns when mitigating and adapting to climate change. ADB shows it is possible to respond to climate change’s most damaging impacts in one of the most populous regions on the planet, whilst also raising efforts to continue long-standing trends of improving healthcare and education.

Chapter 7: The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Introduction

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) views climate change as a significant threat to growth and prosperity, with direct economic consequences for all countries. The IMF seeks to support its members to address climate change challenges with fiscal and macroeconomic tools via an effective financial policy response. With research, the IMF demonstrates the economic consequences of not addressing climate change and provides policy guidance to ‘capture’ the potential benefits to be found in ‘low-carbon, resilient growth’ (IMF, 2022).

The IMF invests heavily in women’s empowerment. Children and young people, families and entire nations prosper when women thrive. In developing nations, women’s roles continue to be central for improving well-being, health and educational outcomes for children and young people, and a nation’s economic performance.

IMF’s Policy Guidance

The IMF (2022) provides policy guidance in three interconnected fields:

Box 7.1: Mitigation

1. Mitigation: including advice on measures to contain and reduce emissions through policies—such as increasing carbon taxes, reducing fuel subsidies and improving regulation—and providing tools to help countries achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions.

Mitigation strategies seek to reduce, address, and plan for the current and potential consequences of climate change. Mitigation can be, in this way, both forward thinking but also as a response to a current problem. Mitigation strategies assume that the time to prevent certain climate change consequences have passed but other consequences can still be prevented. Mitigation works, therefore, in conjunction with adaptation strategies.

Box 7.2: Adaptation

2. Adaptation: including guidance on building financial and institutional resilience to natural disasters and extreme weather events, and infrastructure investments to cope with rising sea levels and other warming-related phenomena.

Similarly, adaptation strategies move beyond prevention to finding suitable ways to accommodate climate change consequences. These adaptation strategies range from life and death scenarios such as living with worsening malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa and flooded Pacific Island communities, to building bushfire resilience in Australia and California through architecture and materials technologies. Prevention, however, remains in the IMF toolbox with their low-carbon economy strategy:

Box 7.3: Transition to a low-carbon economy

3. Transition to a low-carbon economy: including updates to financial sector regulation to cover climate risks and exposure to “brown” assets, as well as measures to help countries diversify economies away from carbon intensive industries while mitigating the social impact on affected communities.

Mitigation and adaptation strategies make little sense unless we are also attempting to improve our behaviours towards environmental degradation. Ultimately, reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the key for improving the future and keeping global temperatures below 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

Poor and Vulnerable Countries Need Support to Adapt to Climate Change

It is, however, the poorest countries that face the greatest risks from climate change whilst also possessing the least capability of effectively responding (Georgieva et al., 2022). As a recent IPCC [report](#) shows, vulnerable countries need support to manage extreme weather events to safeguard agriculture, manage rising sea levels, manage health care infrastructure to ensure the health and well-being of families, and maintain and improve access to finance and telecommunications. It is Sub-Saharan Africa that is again among the most vulnerable regions. They experience a third of the world’s droughts and worsening weather events threaten food supply in an already sparse nutrition availability system. IMF research shows each drought worsens the economic outlook in impacted countries by one financial percentage point (Georgieva et al., 2022).

How Empowering Women Supports Economic Growth

One method to safeguard the lives of children whilst addressing these challenges is to empower women. As climate change and COVID-19 puts women’s roles in a state of ‘flux’, addressing women’s empowerment is more important than ever (IMFBlog, 2022).

IMF research has shown that empowering women improves equality, productivity and financial stability whilst improving the lives as children since women remain, overwhelmingly, primary caregivers across the globe:

- When schools close, and childcare is scarce, women leave the workforce – dubbed in some quarters as a ‘she-cession’.
- [IMF research has shown](#) that mothers leaving employment to care for children under 5 accounts for 16% of the unemployment gap for mothers pre- and post-COVID-19 in the US.
- [Tackling legal impediments to women’s economic empowerment](#): Laws that perpetuate gender inequality, such as those found in some taxation codes, can work to limit women’s economic participation. Advancing action on initiatives like parental leave can work to incentivize women to participate in the workforce.
- In places where gender inequality is entrenched, such as in Sub-Saharan Africa, unleashing the economic potential of women can rapidly advance the economy and enhance the lives and well-being of children in their care.

- Domestic violence has contributed to the shadow pandemic. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse against women in Sub-Saharan Africa inhibits economic development.
- Women's work is devalued in economic counting in on-going ways. Research at [the University of Massachusetts](#) shows that productivity measures are skewed in their failure to account for unpaid work, still primarily performed by women, including caring for and educating children.
- When adapting to climate change offers no role for addressing gender inequality, new forms of exclusion emerge. Many of these forms of exclusion relate to reduced access to education and work. Women and girls remain more acutely impacted by the consequences of climate change.
- During COVID-19, research across three Western countries shows that women with young children experienced job losses at far greater levels than men and other women.

Conclusion

In discussions of the impact and consequences of climate change, the central role of women in raising the next generation, ensuring national economic success, improving global health and well-being, facilitating education, and effectively responding to climate change is rarely front-and-centre. But according to IMF research it should be. It may be that no climate change response can be expected to be successful without women playing a leading role at every level – from strategic planning and resourcing, to mitigation and adaptation strategies, to end users of support funding.

Chapter 8: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Introduction

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, is a global organisation that seeks to support better policy making to create 'prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being' for all people (OECD, n.d.a).

The OECD works with governments, policy makers and citizen groups to build evidence bases for international standards that address the major problems of the 21st century. Many of its concerns relate to children and young people in areas such as intergenerational justice, youth empowerment, work and education often with a focus on poorer nations in developing regions.

Youth and intergenerational justice

The world is changing in complex ways - the population is ageing in most key Western countries; information has become digitalised, but this has coincided with unequal access to information as well as the proliferation of false information; inequality is rising; and the widespread damage of ongoing climate change continues. These 'Global transformations' have resulted in 'profound uncertainties for young people and future generations' (OECD, n.d.b).

The OECD has developed a large body of work devoted to young people, their health and well-being, and their futures across eleven project areas:

1. [Youth inclusion](#)
2. [The power of youth](#)
3. [Youth entrepreneurship](#)
4. [Youth employment](#)
5. [Equity in education](#)
6. [Climate action for the next generation](#)
7. [Career readiness](#)
8. [Financial education and youth](#)
9. [OECD Youthwise](#)
10. [Future of work](#)
11. [Work-based learning and apprenticeships](#)

In addition, the OECD has published numerous reports on various youth issues including two COVID-19 and youth policy papers, hosted webinars, and provided information on conferences and numerous other resources (OECD, n.d.b).

Young People in the MENA region

A 2016 OECD report explored ways to provide young people in the Middle East and North Africa opportunities to become more involved in the economy, society and civic life in their countries.

Box 8.1 Young People in the MENA Region (Source: OECD, 2016: 3)

Young men and women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region face the highest youth unemployment levels in the world and express lower levels of trust in government than their parents. With the share of youth (aged 15-29) exceeding 30% of the working-age population in most countries, MENA countries need to urgently develop and implement strategies focused on fully engaging youth in the economy, society and public life. So far, young people have only limited opportunities to influence policy making, and many lack adequate access to decent employment, quality education and affordable healthcare. The report is the first of its kind to apply a “youth lens” to public governance arrangements. It argues that governments can use open government tools to foster inclusive policy-making with a view to raising their voice in shaping policies and involving them in governance processes such as the allocation of public budgets. By “bringing youth in” to the policy-making process governments help ensure that their needs and concerns are taken into account across the whole of government. With youth on board, governments are more likely to deliver public services that are tailored to their specific needs and more accessible for vulnerable sub-groups such as young women and youth from rural backgrounds.

Following the Arab Spring, young women and men in the MENA regions encountered many obstacles to having a voice in the socio-economic development of their countries. MENA young people face higher unemployment than young people in other regions whilst also representing over 30% of the working-age population. When societal institutions provide no role for young people in these regions, young people do not participate in dialogue and change, are absent from traditional forms of political participation, and generally reject the rigid structures for social belonging established by older generations (OECD, 2016: 3-4).

Youth and COVID-19

The OECD has produced two reports on the impact of COVID-19 on young people.

Their 2020 report, ‘Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience’, was released in June and detailed the ways that the pandemic, the subsequent emergency and the lockdowns were felt differently by young people:

- For young people, especially those that were considered ‘vulnerable’, COVID-19 posed significant challenges to their ability to receive education, earn employment, receive mental health care and maintenance, and accumulate disposable income.
- It will be the young people of today who will shoulder the economic burden of the costs to fight COVID-19’s consequences. This takes the forms of missed opportunities now, and the costs of shouldering the ‘long-term economic and social consequences’ in the future (OECD, 2020).
- Meanwhile, young people’s mental health and well-being is being short-circuited by ‘short-term economic and equity considerations’ (OECD, 2020).

- Governments must be active in avoiding the intergenerational inequalities generated by these forces and seek to include young people in decision-making to build ‘societal resilience’ (OECD, 2020).

The 2020 policy brief detailed findings from 90 youth groups and projects across 48 different countries and recommends the practical measures that can be taken to ensure an equitable COVID-19 response and recovery.

In 2022, the OECD released a second COVID-19 and youth report in March titled ‘Delivering for youth: How governments can put young people at the centre of the recovery’. It is argued in the report that an ‘integrated public governance approach’ to COVID-19 recovery is needed and that governments are currently devoting significant resources to this effort (OECD, 2022).

The 2022 report restates that COVID-19 is experienced differently by different age groups with young people uniquely impacted now and also expected to financially shoulder the future burden of today’s spending. For the 2022 report, 151 youth organisations were studied across 72 countries to explore how young people were experiencing COVID-19 and its repercussions in relation to governmental activities and actions (see Box 8.2 Young People’s experience of COVID-19 and its consequences).

Box 8.2 Young People’s experience of COVID-19 and its consequences (Source: OECD, 2022)

- Youth organisations were concerned primarily about COVID-19’s impact on mental health, education outcomes, family and friendship, and the restraint of freedoms.
- Just over half of the OECD-based youth organisations said their members were satisfied with their government’s use of science in evaluating the pandemic, but were predominantly dissatisfied with the delivery of public services for young people during the crisis.
- Young people were highly concerned with the social impact of COVID-19. For example, 72% were concerned with the erosion of youth rights, 69% with age inequalities, 67% with the spread of disinformation, and 56% with political polarisation.
- While nearly all OECD countries featured socially active youth organisations, only a third of OECD countries had developed a response and recovery plan for COVID-19 providing scope for young people’s engagement in those recovery measures.
- Governments should seek to include young people (indeed, all age groups) in recovery measures including decision making on how best to allocate public resources in ways not based on voting patterns but on need, and by ‘involving young people and youth organisations in building social cohesion and in the implementation of recovery efforts by promoting meaningful volunteer services and youth work through laws, strategies and adequately resourced programmes’.

Conclusion

Whilst the OECD are associated with economic development, they have a considerable suite of youth programs focussed on developing policy for children and young people's empowerment and well-being. Young people, in their view, are uniquely impacted by crises and have an important stake in working toward solutions. Where the OECD has a variety of programs focussed on poorer nations and the developing world, youth empowerment will produce economic and social benefits wherever it can be realised.

Appendix

Important reference documents

IPCC WGI policy summary. [Summary for Policymakers \(ipcc.ch\)](https://www.ipcc.ch/summary-for-policymakers/)

This Summary for Policymakers (SPM) presents key findings of the Working Group I (WGI) contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) on the physical science basis of climate change. The report builds upon the 2013 Working Group I contribution to the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) and the 2018–2019 IPCC Special Reports of the AR6 cycle and incorporates subsequent new evidence from climate science.

IPCC WGII policy summary. [IPCC AR6 WGII SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wgii/)

This Summary for Policymakers (SPM) presents key findings of the Working Group II (WGII) contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the IPCC. The report builds on the WGII contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) of the IPCC, three Special Reports, and the Working Group I (WGI) contribution to the AR6 cycle.

This report recognizes the interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies ... and integrates SPM knowledge more strongly across the natural, ecological, social and economic sciences than earlier IPCC assessments. The assessment of climate change impacts and risks as well as adaptation is set against concurrently unfolding non-climatic global trends e.g., biodiversity loss, overall unsustainable consumption of natural resources, land and ecosystem degradation, rapid urbanisation, human demographic shifts, social and economic inequalities and a pandemic.

IPCC WGIII policy summary. [IPCC AR6 WGIII SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wgiii/)

The Working Group III (WGIII) contribution to the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) assesses literature on the scientific, technological, environmental, economic and social aspects of mitigation of climate change.

The report reflects new findings in the relevant literature and builds on previous IPCC reports, including the WGIII contribution to the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), the WGI and WGII contributions to AR6 and the three Special Reports in the Sixth Assessment cycle, as well as other UN assessments.

Report from *Save the Children*. [Born into the Climate Crisis: Why we must act now to secure children's rights](#) | [Save the Children's Resource Centre](#).

The threat posed to children and their rights by the climate crisis is not theoretical: it is real, and it is urgent. Save the Children has partnered with an international team of leading climate researchers led by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel to quantify the extent to which children will experience extreme weather events as a manifestation of climate change, the disparities between generations, and the widening inequality between high-income and low- and middle-income countries.

UNHCR & UNICEF's 2020 statement on children and climate change. [UNHCR - UNICEF - Climate Change Session High Commissioner Dialogue](#)

Children are agents of change and UNICEF encourages young people all over the world to set an example for their communities, to elevate their voices on climate change and promote environmentally sustainable lifestyles. UNICEF's efforts to empower youth are inclusive and focus on the most vulnerable young people, including those uprooted by climate change.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Many UN initiatives in the fields of young people's well-being and climate change draw guidance from the globally recognised Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs were adopted by the UN in 2015 as 'a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity' (UNDP, 2022).

The UN SDGs

1. **No poverty** by continuing the trend where people living in extreme poverty has more than halved between 1990 and 2015;
2. **Zero hunger** by, again, continuing trends that have seen hunger reduced significantly over the past two decades primarily due to rapid economic growth and agricultural innovation;
3. **Good health and well-being** by continuing trends that have seen life expectancy increase and a decline in catastrophic diseases such as malaria and HIV, coinciding with substantial improvements in maternal and infant mortality rates;
4. **Quality education** through maintaining and improving gains made in keeping children in schooling, especially in the developing world, whilst improving the school attendance rates in regions where rates are low due to poverty, wars and other emergencies.
5. Improve **Gender equality** by 'ending discrimination against women and girls' and by addressing barriers to gender equality.
6. Ensure **Clean water and sanitation** for all people, especially in regions where water and sanitation are lacking. Water scarcity impacts 40% of the world's population and this situation is expected to worsen as temperatures rise.

7. Ensure **Affordable and clean energy** for all by maintaining trends where more people have electricity whilst also mitigating the environmental consequences of the growing population's energy needs.
8. **Decent work and economic growth** where working should not coincide with living in extreme poverty. With an expanding middle class, there must also be an awareness of slowing growth, widening inequality, and job scarcity impacting the availability of work and potential for economic growth.
9. **Industry, innovation and infrastructure** to ensure investment levels are maintained to stimulate economic growth.
10. **Reducing inequalities** means reversing the current rise in income inequality with the richest 10% owning 40% of global income whilst the poorest 10% earned 2-7% of global income. Global income inequality has worsened everywhere. Its rise is slowest in Europe, and highest in the Middle East.
11. **Sustaining cities and communities** means protecting the health and sustainability of the cities where half the world's population lives. By 2050, it is estimated that 2/3 of the world's population will live and work in an urban setting (6.5 billion people).
12. Maintaining **Responsible consumption and production** whilst being mindful of 'our ecological footprint' means altering the ways we consume and produce food and goods. This is particularly so in fields like agriculture where growing food to feed the world's expanding population consumes 70% of the world's drinking water.
13. **Climate action** is essential for mitigating the damage caused by the massive increase in greenhouse gas emissions since 1990. Global warming threatens the health and well-being of every life on this planet.
14. Maintaining the integrity of **Life below water** is essential for human survival. The 'temperature, chemistry, currents and life' of the oceans make the 'Earth habitable for humankind'.
15. And humankind depends on **Life on land** as much as it does life below water. Plant life is 80% of human food, and forests cover 30% of the world's surface providing a home to millions of species of animal as well as clean water and air.
16. Sustainable development relies on **Peace, justice and strong institutions**. The world is sustainable when peace and stability reign, and where human rights and the rule of law are upheld.
17. Perhaps most importantly, **Partnerships** must be forged to achieve these development goals. The development assistance required to achieve these goals is currently below targets, whilst natural and unnatural disasters, many of which have emerged in response to scarcity and climate change, continue to be a drain on these development resources (UNDP, 2022).

WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission. [A future for the world's children? A WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission \(thelancet.com\)](https://www.thelancet.com/commission)

The health and wellbeing of children now and in the future depends on overcoming new challenges that are escalating at such speed as to threaten the progress and successes of the past two decades in child health. The climate emergency is rapidly undermining the future survival of all species, and the likelihood of a world in which all children enjoy their right to health appears

increasingly out of reach. A second existential threat that is more insidious has emerged: predatory commercial exploitation that is encouraging harmful and addictive activities that are extremely deleterious to young people's health.

Local Conference of Youth (COY) website. <https://www.lcoy.earth>

LCOY is an event under the umbrella of YOUNGO, the official youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Its aims are to be a space to boost youth climate action locally and create an input into the international conferences. It represents a national version of the International Conference of Youth (COY), which takes place immediately before the Conference of Parties (COP), the annual UN-Climate Conference.

On the road to COP27 webinar series. [Climate change education for social transformation | UNESCO](#)

Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution have led to a planetary crisis that requires an urgent response. UN Secretary-General António Guterres calls the climate crisis 'a battle for our lives', as we struggle to transform our societies to reach the 1.5-degree path recommended by the Paris Agreement. In an increasingly complex and interconnected world with a real, existential threat such as climate change, there is a growing call for education to enable individuals, as agents of change, to acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that lead to the green transition of our societies, as enshrined in SDG Target 4.7, and, indeed, in the entire 2030 Agenda.

UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth. [UNESCO operational strategy on youth 2014-2021 - UNESCO Digital Library](#)

Around the world, young women and men are driving change and claiming respect for fundamental freedoms and rights; improved conditions for them and their communities; opportunities to learn, work and participate in decisions that affect them. At the same time, due to persistent crises, they are faced with acute challenges affecting important aspects of their lives. More than ever, it is now time to improve investment in research, policies and programmes to create an enabling and rights-based environment where youth prosper, exercise rights, regain hope and a sense of community, and engage as responsible social actors and innovators.

World Bank, *Groundswell* report. [Groundswell on Internal Migration | World Bank Group](#)

Groundswell reports showcase projections and analysis of internal climate migration for Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, East Asia and the Pacific, North Africa and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia regions.

Groundswell reports [Part I](#) and [Part II](#) combined findings provide a global picture of the potential scale of internal climate migration across the six regions, allowing for a better understanding of how slow-onset climate change impacts population dynamics, and development contexts shape mobility trends. They also highlight the far-sighted planning needed to meet this challenge to ensure positive and sustainable development outcomes.

YOUNGO website. [YOUNGO | UNFCCC](#)

[YOUNGO](#) is the official children and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). YOUNGO is a vibrant, global network of children and youth activists (up to 35 years) as well as youth NGOs, who contribute to shaping the intergovernmental climate change policies and strive to empower youth to formally bring their voices to the UNFCCC processes.

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