



plataforma
de infancia
españa

The challenges environmental
degradation and climate change
present for children



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and climate change present
for children

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01 INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation and climate change are among the main concerns facing society today, and in recent years the focus of this concern has turned to the impact on children and adolescents. This is primarily because children and adolescents feature prominently in the fight against climate change, but also due to various reports published on the subject which have shown that environmental degradation affects these age groups more severely.

The topic is now included on the agendas of international bodies such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which has created a working group tasked with drafting a specific General Comment on the issue.

In addition, at state and regional level, specific programmes and actions have been implemented to protect children from environmental degradation; however, these are not yet sufficient to address the problems facing the present generation as well as future generations.

It is important to highlight the fact that children and adolescents have been at the forefront when it comes to drawing attention to the real issues at stake here, defending their right to a healthy environment, highlighting the need for urgent action and the need for their voices to be heard and taken into consideration when measures to address these issues are being designed and implemented.

The objective of this document is to reflect and begin a discussion on the principal challenges involved and the proposals that children's organisations need to work on in order to guarantee children's right to a healthy environment.

This document was created in collaboration with the organisations which make up the *Plataforma de Infancia* (Platform for Children) and with experts in the field, and includes input from children and adolescents. Children from member organisations, showing a strong commitment to the environment, have come together to evaluate and draw up proposals which will help provide better protection for the environment and, as a consequence, improve their lives. In exercising their right to participate and be heard regarding the issues which affect them, they have expressed opinions which have influenced the organisation's positions.





02 KEY CONCEPTS

→ 2.1 What is the environment?

The environment can be defined as all of the chemical, physical and biological elements with which living beings interact¹. From a legal perspective, international treaties, declarations and codes of conduct have been reluctant to provide a definition of the term 'environment'.

However, progress has been made in this regard in recent years. Particularly noteworthy was the international recognition in 2021 of the **human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**, which explicitly details the obligations all states must fulfil in order to safeguard human life.

→ 2.2 What is environmental degradation?

Irrespective of the definitions used, for decades scientific evidence has shown that environmental degradation is and will be one of the key issues that future generations will have to face, and one which we are already facing today: the depletion of natural assets such as water, soil and air, including the ecosystem, as well as the deterioration of wildlife and natural habitats and environmental pollution, are the major concerns of both the present and the future.

We are experiencing what is often broadly defined as 'environmental degradation', a process in which the environment is damaged in a certain manner, affecting its overall health and reducing biodiversity. This process may be natural in origin, but is often accelerated or caused by human activity. Each and every one of us therefore has a clear duty to do what we can to reverse environmental degradation, because without the environment, there is no life.



1. World Health Organization.



➔ 2.3 What is climate change?

Climate change is one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time, and its impact and effects are far-reaching. It is defined as “a change in climate attributed directly or indirectly to human activity, which alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods”².

Climate change can cause weather patterns to become less predictable, which can put the environment and human and animal life as we know it at risk. Hurricanes, floods, torrential rainfall, winter storms, more droughts and more frequent and intense heat waves affect and endanger wildlife species and human life itself.

Climate change has been accelerated by pollutant emissions associated with human activity, and by the burning of fossil fuels which increase the levels of greenhouse gases, trapping heat in the earth’s atmosphere and raising its temperature.

It is therefore essential that we adopt effective mitigation policies to reduce human-caused greenhouse gas emissions and limit future climate change.

“We depend on natural resources and climate change is a threat which could end our lives. Climate change is transversal, i.e., it is a problem which is connected to politics and other social issues, such as inequalities and poverty.

“This generation which is fighting for change and transformation, in support of life, is also striving for peace among humankind, as well as between humans and animals and nature”³.

2. Article 1.2 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

3. Francisco Vera.



03 ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND THE ROLE OF CHILDREN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

The reality of climate change today



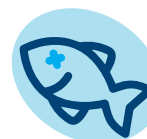
Global temperatures have already risen by about 1.2°C since pre-industrial times, and in Europe that figure is almost 2.2°C⁴. The six years beginning with 2015 were the hottest ever recorded. The decade from 2011 to 2020 was the hottest ever recorded⁵. The year 2020 was one of the three hottest years globally, and the hottest in Europe, ever recorded⁶.



Torrential rains and the melting of the polar ice caps have led to a 16% rise in sea levels since the beginning of the 20th century, directly affecting populations who live on riverbanks and near the sea, **who have had to relocate**. This increase in salt water represents an increase in the difficulty of access to drinking water for many populations. In many places, children and especially girls have to travel miles to access drinking water.



This general increase in temperatures has caused **extreme weather events** such as torrential rains, severe droughts, tornadoes and hurricanes in recent years. These weather events have caused **600,000 deaths around the world**. People in vulnerable situations account for a large percentage of these deaths.



In addition, the warming of the oceans directly affects the fauna who inhabit them, and may lead to **the extinction of many species** because they are unable to adapt to these new temperatures. The warming of the oceans and seas will cause a displacement of the species and will make fishing difficult, causing problems of malnutrition.



Lack of rainfall directly affects **access to safe drinking water**, a problem already faced by 40% of the world's population. It also affects **crop yields**, which has an impact on rates of **malnutrition**.



Spain is particularly vulnerable to climate change as it is more at risk of desertification, loss of beaches and extreme weather events. According to the State Meteorological Agency (AEMET in the Spanish acronym⁷), 2020 was the hottest year on record in Spain. The overall temperature has risen by 1.7°C since pre-industrial times, and by 1.3°C in the last 60 years.

4. Informe sobre el estado del clima en 2020 en España (Report on the state of the climate in Spain in 2020). Spanish State Meteorological Agency.

5. The State of the Global Climate 2020, Unpacking the indicators. World Meteorological Organization, 2020.

6. Informe sobre el estado del clima en 2020 en España (Report on the state of the climate in Spain in 2020). Spanish State Meteorological Agency.

7. Informe sobre el estado del clima en 2020 en España (Report on the state of the climate in Spain in 2020). Spanish State Meteorological Agency.



Organised civil society has been pressing for action on climate change and environmental degradation for decades. From NGOs to various social movements to green parties, for years people have been emphasising the importance of urgently addressing environmental matters in a coordinated manner. The environment and issues related to climate change have been forced onto the political agenda in recent years, obliging governments and political parties to incorporate the climate agenda into their government programmes and policy proposals.

Society as a whole also sees this is a key issue. According to recent [Eurobarometer](#) data, Europeans see climate change as the main problem facing the world as a whole.

The role of children and young people

Children and young people have been aware of and involved in environmental issues for many years, but since 2018 their leadership has become more visible. The activism of a number of local organisations and the Fridays for Future movement have inspired global climate strikes and worldwide student movements. The role of child and youth activism has had such an impact in this field that it has led to the international recognition of [children and young people as defenders of human rights](#), who need to be provided with a safe and empowering platform to defend environment-related human rights⁸. The word 'future' appears in all of their statements in order to emphasise that it is their future that is at stake and to communicate the idea that the fight against climate change is a fight for the future of generations to come.

The data confirms how important this issue is to children and young people. In 2021 the European Commission commissioned a survey entitled [Climate of Change](#)⁹ in order to analyse the views of young people aged between 15 and 35 on environmental issues. The report showed that they perceive climate change as the main problem facing the world, followed by environmental degradation.

For children and adolescents, this is a vital issue which affects their present and will determine their future and that of generations to come.



The children and adolescents consulted were particularly concerned about the following issues:

- ➔ Excessive use of cars.
- ➔ The large amounts of litter on streets.
- ➔ The use of the sea as a rubbish dump.
- ➔ The high cost of sustainable products, which are far more expensive than the alternatives (for food items as well as resources and energy).
- ➔ Deforestation and widespread logging.
- ➔ Excessive use of plastic and aluminium foil.
- ➔ The amount of polluting smoke from factories.
- ➔ Disposable face masks, which are everywhere.
- ➔ Excessive use of greenhouse gases.
- ➔ Excessive buying of electrical appliances.
- ➔ Waste of resources such as water and electricity.
- ➔ Poor awareness of the importance of recycling.

8. Resolution A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1, 2019.

9. Pan-European Survey. Main multi-country report. 2021.



04 THE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

A growing number of studies are uncovering evidence of the impact of climate change on children's rights, and that the most vulnerable children are also the most affected.

A Save the Children study published in the journal *Science*¹⁰ and led by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (Germany), has shown that people born today will experience far more extreme heatwaves and other climate catastrophes in their lifetimes than their grandparents. A child born in 2020 will, on average, experience twice as many forest fires, 2.8 times as many crop failures, 2.6 times as many droughts, 2.8 times as many river floods and 6.8 times as many heat waves in their lifetime compared to a person born in 1960¹¹.



10. "Intergenerational Inequities in Exposure to Climate Extremes" report.

11. Born into the Climate Crisis: Save the Children report.



➔ 4.1 Right to health

Environmental degradation and climate change, which have increased severely in recent years, have a major impact on the health of all people. In fact, the scientific community estimates that the impact of climate change on health is so great that it could reverse all of the health improvements of the last 50 years¹².

Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to these environmental changes as they lack the natural capacity to adapt to certain external conditions, such as more extreme temperatures and increased CO2 levels, among other factors.

The WHO estimates that about 1.7 million children under the age of five die prematurely each year due to modifiable environmental factors¹³, mainly air and water pollution and poor sanitation. This figure accounts for a quarter of all deaths in this age group worldwide.

According to some studies¹⁴, Spain is located in a region which is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures, variations in rainfall patterns and droughts can seriously affect sectors such as agriculture, livestock, forestry and tourism. These factors also impact negatively on the health of the population, especially those at risk of poverty, since they affect the global food system and thus children's nourishment during the crucial early period of physical and mental development.

Scientific evidence has shown that **air pollution in cities** is a major public health problem and a significant risk factor for diseases such as respiratory infections, asthma, cardiovascular disease and lung cancer.

In Spain, 44,600 people over the age of fourteen die each year due to pollution, according to the Environmental Research report. This report focuses especially on infants and children under the age of five, as they are biologically and neurologically more susceptible than adults to the many adverse effects of air pollutants from fossil fuel combustion. An estimated 605 children under the age of five die each year in Europe from lower respiratory tract infections¹⁵.

It is important to note that according to Spain's National Statistics Institute (INE in the Spanish acronym), the Spanish economy emitted 274.6 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in 2020, 15.6 per cent less than in 2019. This reduction was due to the health crisis caused by the COVID19 pandemic¹⁶. During 2021 and the beginning of 2022, industry and commerce have been reactivated, which has again led to a high level of emissions of these gases and the use of fossil fuels. Many families do not use public transport due to fear of infection and are instead using private vehicles, causing large traffic jams and high CO2 emissions, particularly in areas close to schools.

Higher temperatures and heatwaves impact most severely on the very young, as children are less able to regulate their body temperature and are at risk of fever, respiratory illness and kidney disease, among other ailments¹⁷. A recent study on this issue published in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*¹⁸ involved extensive research into the rise in body temperature in people under the age of eighteen in the United States. By analysing emergency department visits during heat waves, they found that children were more vulnerable to these events. While children dissipate heat in the same way as adults, they are affected differently, in part because of differences in body surface area, fat composition and hydration.

12. *El impacto del cambio climático en la infancia en España* (The impact of climate change on children in Spain), UNICEF.

13. *Inheriting a Sustainable World: Atlas on Children's Health and the Environment*, WHO.

14. IEESE (Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies) reports.

15. Global mortality from outdoor fine particle pollution generated by fossil fuel combustion: Results from GEOS-Chem, 2021.

16. *Las emisiones de Gases de Efecto Invernadero (GEI) en España* (Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Spain), Epdata, 2020.

17. *Born into the Climate Crisis, Save the Children* report.

18. Report: Warm Season and Emergency Department Visits to U.S. Children's Hospitals.



Exposure to high temperatures is more common in cities. Air pollution caused by vehicles and industrial activities, asphalt streets which retain heat and make the ground impermeable, and buildings being so close together, thus preventing heat from being released, create so-called “**urban heat islands**”. All of these factors, together with the lack of green spaces (parks and trees) and blue spaces (sea, rivers, ponds, fountains), lead to temperature rises which can have serious effects on health, especially for children and the elderly.

In addition, the combination of rising temperatures and high levels of pollution and the increased flowering of certain plants has led to a considerable **increase in cases of childhood allergies**. This in turn leads directly to increased hospital admissions, asthma attacks and poor school performance of children and adolescents who suffer from allergies.

Another consequence of rising temperatures is the increased risk of fires, due to a lack of rainfall and drier ground. The disappearance of forested areas and the particles emitted by fires can cause respiratory diseases in children.

Noise exposure has a negative impact on hearing, interferes with oral communication, decreases performance and learning, causes irritability and nervousness as well as changes in behaviour, and even affects children's cognitive capacity (attention, perception, language, etc.). This alters their learning and development processes, which can result in a lack of motivation and anxiety and even lead to stress and sleep disturbances. It should not be forgotten that noise can be a major cause of stress and can lead to nervousness, tension and anxiety (a number of studies have found that it can increase aggression and decrease altruistic behaviour). In extreme situations, noise can lead to alterations in blood pressure, hormone secretion, etc.^{19, 20, 21}.

Recent research is linking air pollution with other diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, breast cancer, digestive system and bladder cancer, anxiety and other disorders such as obesity, further increasing the socio-economic cost of pollution²².

Children's **food security** is also threatened by environmental degradation. It is estimated that climate change will reduce agricultural production by 10-25 per cent globally by 2080 due to extreme weather effects: droughts, floods, high temperatures, etc. It will also cause almost 95,000 additional deaths per year in children under five years of age due to malnutrition by 2030, and 24 million more malnourished children by 2050²³.

This deterioration of the world's crop-based food system and the rising price of certain food staples may lead to an increase in the consumption and production of ultra-processed foods, which would have a direct impact on children's diets and increase the risk of diseases related to poor nutrition, such as **childhood obesity**. Spain is among the European countries where this public health issue is most serious; roughly 40% of children are overweight, of which 19% of boys - almost one in five - and 17% of girls suffer from obesity²⁴.

Childhood obesity has immediate and long-term effects on physical, social and emotional health. Children with obesity are at increased risk of other chronic health conditions and diseases such as asthma, sleep apnoea, bone and joint problems, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. They are also at increased risk of social isolation, depression and low self-esteem.

19. *Ruido y Salud en Madrid* (Noise and health in Madrid), Instituto DKV de Vida Saludable (the DKV Institute for Healthy Living), in collaboration with GAES.

20. *Análisis de la exposición a la contaminación atmosférica y acústica en los centros educativos de Madrid* (Analysis of exposure to air and noise pollution in schools in Madrid). Ecologistas en Acción (Ecologists in Action).

21. Report: Health impacts related to urban and transport planning: A burden of disease assessment.

22. Informe Rumbo 20.30 Habitabilidad y salud 2018.

23. *El impacto del cambio climático en la infancia en España* (The impact of climate change on children in Spain). UNICEF, 2017.

24. The European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative, World Health Organization (WHO).



Exclusive breastfeeding for 4 to 6 months may confer protection against childhood obesity²⁵. Breastfeeding for more than 12 months offers a significant protective effect on obesity in children and adolescents²⁶.

In other words, there is scientific evidence that breastfeeding, even if partial or short-term, has a protective effect in preventing overweight and obesity. Obesity in boys, girls and adolescents²⁷.

Access to drinking water is also affected by environmental phenomena. For example, droughts and extreme temperatures reduce access to drinking water and an increase in cases of diarrhoea in children has already been observed in countries such as Peru, Australia and Israel. Diarrhoea is one of the greatest health risks for children and is closely linked to poor access to quality water and lack of sanitation. Currently, 663 million people do not have adequate access to water sources and more than 800 children under the age of five die every day from diarrhoea linked to unsafe water and lack of sanitation and hygiene²⁸.

Finally, when discussing the deterioration of agriculture systems, it is important to mention that the excessive use of fertilisers and chemical products in agriculture has a harmful effect both on the health of the people who consume the products and on the environment in general. These chemicals seep into the soil, contaminating groundwater and causing serious harm to humans²⁹.



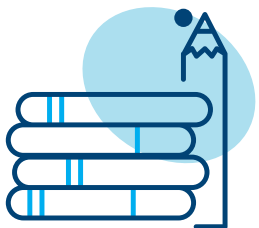
25. Hunsberger M, Lanfer A., Reeske prevalence of obesity in eight . Veidebaum European T, Russo countriesP, Handjigeorge C, Moreno LA, Molnar D, De Henauw S, Lissner the IDEFICS study . Public Health Nutr 16(2):219L, Eibe GA et al.(2012). Infant feeding practices and 227 DOI10.1017/S1368980012003850.

26. Verstraete of recently SG, Heyman immigrated MB y latina Wojcicki women JM. (2014). munity Breastfeeding offers . J protection Community Health . Jun ; 39 : 480 against obesity in children 6 DOI 10.1007/s 109000139781-

27. Gonzalez-Jimenez E, Montero Alonso MA, Schmidt- RioValle J, GarciaGarcia CJ, Padez C. (2014). Metabolic syndrome in Spanish adolescents and its association with birth weight, breastfeeding duration, maternal smoking, and maternal obesity : a cross-sectional study . Eur J Nutr. Jul 23.

28. *El impacto del cambio climático en la infancia en España* (The impact of climate change on children in Spain). UNICEF, 2017.

29. Bioteco magazine, 2018.



➔ 4.2 Right to education

Air pollution, in addition to having serious effects on the respiratory health of young children, also **affects their neurocognitive development**, thus impacting their school performance³⁰. Specifically, one study found a link between early exposure to polluted environments and a reduced capacity for recall, concluding that “exposure to air pollutants during childhood jeopardises the achievement of full neurodevelopmental potential and diminishes the mental capital of the population”³¹. In addition, the most common diseases caused by air pollution, including asthma, allergies, and different types of cancer, can affect children's school performance and cognitive development³².

Moreover, high levels of **noise pollution** in school environments can lead to attention deficit, poor auditory discrimination, overexertion and stress, as well as learning impairment, particularly in terms of language skills such as reading. The latter has a particularly harmful effect in the first years of school. In the city of Madrid, it is estimated that at least 40% of schools have “worrying” noise levels^{33, 34}.

Environmental disasters have also been responsible for the destruction of a large number of schools around the world. The **destruction of these schools** means that many children and adolescents face interruptions in their schooling, in some cases for long periods, resulting in significant setbacks in their educational development.

In this regard, estimates suggest that if current trends continue, by 2025 climate change will be a contributing factor to 12.5 million girls being unable to complete their education each year³⁵. Every additional year a girl spends in school improves a country's resilience, i.e. its ability to adapt to climate change³⁶.



30. Association between Early Life Exposure to Air Pollution and Working Memory and Attention. Environmental Health Perspectives, Vol. 127, No. 5 (nih.gov).

31. Rivas et al, 2019.

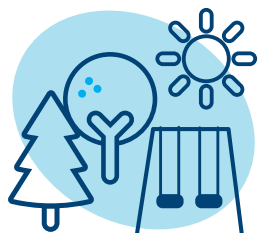
32. Report: Global mortality from outdoor fine particle pollution generated by fossil fuel combustion: Results from GEOS-Chem.

33. *Ruido y Salud en Madrid* (Noise and health in Madrid). Instituto DKV de Vida Saludable (DKV Healthy Living Institute).

34. Report: *Análisis de la exposición a la contaminación atmosférica y acústica en los centros educativos de Madrid* (Analysis of exposure to atmospheric and noise pollution in schools in Madrid). Ecologistas en Acción (Ecologists in Action).

35. Malala Fund (2021). A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls' education.

36. Three platforms for girls' education in climate strategies. Brookings Institute, 2017.



➔ 4.3 Right to play

The way of life of city dwellers today, combined with environmental degradation, also have a negative effect on children and adolescents' enjoyment of their right to leisure and free time. This is mainly due to the lack of **safe and healthy environments** which they can enjoy fully and safely, such as green spaces in areas near schools and in large cities in general, where the concentration of CO₂ is very high.

Furthermore, the increase in traffic has led to a reduction in the amount of space in streets for children to play in, while the perception of **danger in cities** has resulted in overprotection and constant supervision of children by adults. This restricts their autonomy and hinders their learning and mastering of numerous skills which are essential for healthy physical development and for the development of basic psychological abilities, such as social skills, problem solving, spatial orientation, perceived self-efficacy, self-care, self-confidence, etc.



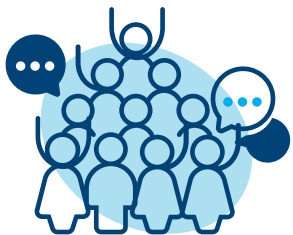
➔ 4.4 Right to adequate housing

One of the most damaging effects of climate change on children is the **increase in extreme temperatures**, which particularly affects the most vulnerable children, whose homes often lack insulation or ventilation or are unfit for habitation.

In Spain, buildings account for 30% of energy consumption, 17.1% in the residential sector and 12.4% in the tertiary sector. Of the 25 million existing dwellings, more than 50% were built before 1979, when there were no thermal insulation regulations.

Generally, the least energy-efficient dwellings are inhabited by the most vulnerable people, who thus face higher energy bills which they may have difficulty paying. This makes their homes less comfortable and can even affect their health. Some households are faced with the “heat or eat” dilemma, i.e. the choice between heating and adequate and sufficient food, since due to high energy costs and their economic situation they cannot afford both.

This **energy poverty** has an impact on the well-being and development of children. As stated in Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adequate housing is especially important for children and states have an obligation to provide the necessary support to families in need.



➔ 4.5 Right to participate

Children's right to participate is one of the four core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, meaning that children's views must be sought in all matters which affect them.

Children are directly affected by the climate emergency. Their present, their future and their way of life is at stake. **Children's participation in the public debate on climate change is therefore essential.**

Although in recent years children and young people's role in calling for climate action has been decisive in the issue becoming ever more prevalent in political and social discourse, they have not always been consulted in decision-making, and this is still the case.

It is important to ensure that all groups in society are represented and participate, and such inclusivity should focus on gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity and disability, among other factors. The Gender and Climate Change report published in 2020³⁷ by the Ministry of Equality highlights the concern regarding the lack of participation by women and girls in issues related to the environment. It is therefore essential that specific participation mechanisms are created to broaden and improve the platforms for participation in this area.



➔ 4.6 Right to a life free of violence

Climate change also affects children's security. Due to adverse weather conditions, many children and adolescents **are forced to migrate from their home region** to other locations.

While making these journeys, as well as facing severe weather conditions, they may be victims of violence such as abandonment or trafficking, or violence inflicted by armed groups. Girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence, being forced into child marriage and other gender-based violence. Children who are not accompanied by family members or who have a disability face a higher risk of exclusion and violence.

These situations can also negatively affect children's mental health, causing many children and adolescents to suffer from mental illness for the rest of their lives.



37. Género y cambio climático: Un diagnóstico de situación (Gender and climate change: an analysis of the current situation), Ministry of Equality, 2020.



➔ 4.7 Right to non-discrimination

Violations of the right to health, the right to education and the other rights mentioned above **can disproportionately affect children and adolescents in vulnerable situations**, such as migrant children, children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Environmental degradation affects these children more severely as their living conditions generally mean they are less able to deal with the effects of climate change.

Child poverty in Spain is heavily influenced by geography, with significant variations between the different regions³⁸. Vulnerable families tend to live in areas with a higher concentration of industrial activity and businesses, and fewer green spaces. Moreover, in many cases it is difficult for such families to access basic services such as electricity and drinking water.

Depopulation in rural areas and the lack of specific policies for rural environments have a direct impact on the children who live there. Some of the most extreme natural disasters occur in rural areas, such as fires, crop failures due to droughts, etc. These result in the loss of jobs in agriculture and thus affect the livelihoods of many families with dependent children. Children living in these rural environments, as well as being affected by these issues also have fewer options for education, limited access to basic services, etc.³⁹.



38. *Geografía de la pobreza infantil en España* (Geography of Child Poverty in Spain), High Commission for Child Poverty, 2021.

39. *Geografía de la pobreza infantil en España* (Geography of Child Poverty in Spain), High Commission for Child Poverty, 2021.



05 RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental law is inextricably linked to human rights and children's rights.

Many human rights and children's rights clearly depend on the environment: without a healthy environment with clean air and water and the sustenance they provide, people, including children and adolescents, lack the most basic necessities in life.

Moreover, human rights and children's rights provide a framework for reinforcing and strengthening environmental law, as much environmental damage can be addressed through the protection and exercise of human rights. For example, the rights to freedom of expression and association, and the rights to education, information, participation and access to effective remedies are all fundamental to environmental protection.

As the Special Rapporteur on human rights obligations regarding the assurance of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (hereinafter the Special Rapporteur) has stated, **human rights and environmental protection are interdependent.**



Civil society, and the United Nations, have expended great effort over the last decade in order to outline and build upon this close relationship between the environment and human rights and children's rights. As a result, states' obligations to respect, protect and promote these rights regarding the environment have been progressively refined. In fact, at the United Nations, this process of developing interdependence and interaction has been referred to as the "greening" of existing human rights. (A/HRC/37/59, Special Rapporteur).

In this regard, in October 2021, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 48/13, recognising **for the first time the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment**. This is a very important milestone which establishes that states are liable for environmental damage and the effects of climate change, as these impact negatively, both directly and indirectly, on citizens' ability to effectively enjoy their human rights.

It is hoped that in the coming years this resolution will speed up the process of states integrating the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment into their constitutions and national laws, and adopt policies to ensure all citizens are assured this right. This hope is rooted in Resolution 64/292 of 2010, which recognised access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right for the first time, and which prompted changes to legislation and public policy in many countries aimed at guaranteeing this new right.

Despite this recent progress, there is still a long way to go. The effects that environmental degradation and climate change have on the rights of children and adolescents are a common concern of many UN bodies and representatives, who have outlined various recommendations in recent years.



The Human Rights Council, in various resolutions, has recognised the following:

- ➔ That children are one of the groups which are most vulnerable to climate change and the effects of environmental damage, which can have serious repercussions for their enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as on their access to education, adequate food and shelter, safe drinking water and sanitation⁴⁰.
- ➔ That climate change and the effects of environmental damage affect some children more than others, such as children with disabilities, children in transit, children living in poverty, children who are separated from their families and indigenous children⁴¹.
- ➔ That children and young people need to be provided with safe and empowering platforms for the initiatives they organise as defenders of human rights related to the environment⁴².

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)⁴³ has published several reports on the relationship between climate change, environmental degradation, the SDGs and children's rights. In these reports, it recommends that, in order to adopt an approach to climate change and the environment based on children's rights, all relevant actors should take steps to:

- ➔ Ensure the coherence of policies concerning children's rights.

- ➔ Empower children and adolescents to participate in the formulation of climate action policies.
- ➔ Ensure that children and adolescents have access to legal remedies to redress climate-related harm.
- ➔ Better understand the impact of climate change on children and mobilise adequate resources to support rights-based climate action.
- ➔ Consider the particular needs of the children who are most vulnerable to climate change and its effects.

The **Special Rapporteur** has focused on the increasing attention being paid to the relationship between children's rights and environmental damage, describing the serious effects of environmental damage on children's rights and specifying human rights obligations regarding children's rights in the context of the environment⁴⁴.

The **Committee on the Rights of the Child** is also paying increasing attention to the relationship between environmental protection and children's rights.

Although the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (CRC) was adopted in 1989, when the benchmark climate framework had not yet been launched, its text made reference to the environment in Article 24:

"States Parties recognise the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health [...] States Parties will adopt measures to combat disease and malnutrition, to ensure the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution".

Likewise, other international human rights treaties, such as the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, had already enshrined children's rights, including the right to health and a healthy life.

In accordance with the principle of the **interdependence and indivisibility of human rights**, when children cannot enjoy the right to a healthy and safe environment, their other rights are seriously undermined, including the rights to life, survival and development, health, water and sanitation, an adequate standard of living including food and housing, culture, play, education, bodily integrity, freedom from economic exploitation, information and participation. A healthy environment is therefore a key determinant of human health and is crucial if children and adolescents are to enjoy all their rights.

40. A/HRC/RES/32/33, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 1st of July, 2016 32/33. Human rights and climate change; A/HRC/RES/45/30, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 7th of October, 2020. The rights of the child: realising the rights of the child through a healthy environment.

41. A/HRC/RES/35/20, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 22nd of June, 2017. Human rights and climate change; A/HRC/RES/48/13, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 8th of October, 2021. The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

42. A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1 Recognising the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development.

43. A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1 Recognising the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development.

44. A/HRC/37/58, January 2018, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations related to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment - children's rights regarding the environment.



As such, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has issued a number of Comments urging governments, civil society and the private sector to ensure a healthy environment for children and to ensure consideration of their best interests and their participation in all matters affecting them:

- ➔ [General Comment No. 12 on the right of the child to be heard \(2009\).](#)
- ➔ [General Comment No. 14 on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration \(2013\).](#)
- ➔ [General Comment No. 15 on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health \(Article 24\) \(2013\).](#)
- ➔ [General Comment No. 16, State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights \(2016\).](#)
- ➔ [General Comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence \(2016\).](#)

More recently, the [**Committee on the Rights of the Child, at its 2016 day of general discussion**](#), brought together over 250 participants to discuss the impact of environmental damage on children's rights. The discussion focused on the underlying causes that exacerbate grave violations of children's rights, namely conflicts caused by limited resources, increasing inequalities, forced migration and child marriage.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child's gradual linking of children's rights and the environment will reach its peak during 2022 and 2023, with the adoption of [**General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change**](#).

Last but not least, in September 2021 the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a landmark decision on the [**first individual communication submitted by 16 children**](#). Although the committee's final decision was that the communication was inadmissible, they set an important precedent by accepting the notion of extraterritorial accountability for the negative impact of states' carbon emissions on children's rights.

Individual Communication under the Third Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On the 23rd of September 2019, for the first time, 16 children from 12 countries submitted an [**individual communication to the Committee on the Rights of the Child asking them to hold five states - Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany and Turkey**](#) – accountable for the harmful effects of climate change on children's rights.

The children alleged that these five countries, longstanding emitters who had recognised the competence of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to receive petitions, had failed to take the necessary preventive measures to protect and respect children's rights to life, health and culture. The children also argued that the climate crisis is not an abstract future threat and that the 1.1°C rise in global average temperature since pre-industrial times has already caused devastating heat waves, forest fires, extreme weather patterns, flooding and rising sea levels, and fuelled the spread of infectious diseases. As children, they said, they were among the most affected by these life-threatening environmental impacts, both mentally and physically.

In September 2021, the committee issued [**a landmark decision**](#), ruling that a State Party can be held accountable for the negative impact of its carbon emissions on children's rights both within and outside its territory.

This is the first decision of its kind by an international body.

Specifically, the committee found that Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany and Turkey had effective control over activities which are sources of emissions which contribute to reasonably foreseeable harm to children outside their territories. It concluded that a sufficient causal link had been established between the harm alleged by the 16 children and the acts or omissions of the five states for the purposes of establishing jurisdiction, and that the children had sufficiently substantiated the charge that the harm they had personally suffered was significant.

However, the committee declined to rule on whether the States Parties in this specific case had violated their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The complaint procedures stipulate that petitions are admissible only after the complainants have brought the complaint before national courts and exhausted any legal remedies that may be available and effective in the countries concerned before bringing their complaint before the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



We have yet to outline the **principal obligations that states are currently required to fulfil** regarding this interdependent relationship between human rights, children's rights and the environment. These obligations can be found in the various guidelines issued by the Special Rapporteur, the OHCHR, the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. As the Special Rapporteur indicates, these are not new obligations, but obligations that respond to existing human rights obligations in the context of the environment.

The Special Rapporteur makes clear (in A/HRC/25/53) that not all states have formally accepted all of these regulations, and while many of the obligations described (...) *“are based directly on treaties or binding decisions of human rights courts, others are based on declarations by human rights bodies which have the power to interpret human rights law, but not necessarily to make binding decisions”*.

All the same, they constitute a solid basis for understanding and fulfilling obligations regarding human rights and children's rights in relation to the environment.





Principal obligations of states regarding children and environmental protection

States should take the necessary measures to ensure children and adolescents fully enjoy all of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and protect them from the effects of environmental damage by means of effective regulation and enforcement mechanisms.	In particular, states are called upon to: ➔ Recognise the right to a healthy environment in national legislation with a view to promoting justiciability, increasing accountability and facilitating greater child and adolescent participation. ➔ Make the best interests of the child a primary consideration when taking decisions related to the environment. ➔ Commit to taking preventive measures when there are threats of serious or irreversible harm to children and adolescents as a result of the effects of environmental damage. ➔ Intensify efforts to monitor children's exposure to hazardous substances by gathering information on the effects of environmental damage on children. ➔ Ensure that such information is available and accessible to society and especially to children, in age-appropriate language and formats.
States have an obligation to ensure the right of the child or adolescent to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, without discrimination of any kind, including sexual and reproductive health, throughout his or her life.	In particular, states are called upon to: ➔ Ensure the availability, quality, accessibility and acceptability of health information, products, and services. ➔ Take measures to ensure that the basic determinants of health, such as food, water and housing, are free of hazardous substances. ➔ Detect and eliminate sources of exposure of children and adolescents to indoor and outdoor air pollution and substances such as heavy metals and endocrine disruptors.
States should ensure that children have access to legal remedies and to timely, effective, inclusive, gender-, disability- and age-sensitive resources when their rights are violated or undermined as a result of the impact of environmental damage.	In particular, states are called upon to: ➔ Provide relevant information on violations of children's rights as a result of environmental damage, as well as on redress mechanisms. ➔ Provide children and adolescents with access to effective assistance and establish independent, child-friendly complaints procedures. ➔ Ensure effective and prompt remediation of damage, including rehabilitation of contaminated sites. ➔ Cease the actions or omissions which give rise to the adverse effects. Provide appropriate compensation.
States have an obligation to create opportunities for the inclusive and meaningful participation of children and adolescents, taking into account their evolving capacities, in decision-making processes in relation to the environment which may affect their development and survival, ensuring the equal and meaningful participation of both girls and boys.	In particular, states are called upon to: ➔ Take affirmative action to respect, protect and ensure children's rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. ➔ Establish consultation mechanisms based on participatory, evidence-based decision-making processes which take into account the views of children and adolescents. ➔ Provide education on the environment as part of the schooling of children and adolescents. ➔ Train teachers on environmental issues. ➔ Enact provisions to ensure the availability and accessibility of age- and disability-appropriate information on the effects of environmental damage.
States should take all appropriate, reasonable and necessary measures to prevent business enterprises from committing or contributing to violations of children's rights.	In particular, states are called upon to: ➔ Regulate private actors, including by holding them accountable for any damage they may cause, both at domestic and extraterritorial level. End financial incentives and investments in activities and infrastructure which are not compatible with low greenhouse gas emissions, whether undertaken by public or private actors, as a mitigation measure to avoid further damage and risks. ➔ Regularly monitor the environmental impacts of business activities and require companies to exercise due diligence in relation to children's rights in all of their activities. ➔ Take measures to ensure, through judicial, administrative, legislative or other appropriate channels, that when violations of children's rights are committed within their territory and/or jurisdiction, those affected have access to effective remedy, without fear of reprisals.



Studies, reports and recommendations on children's rights, the environment, climate change and the SDGs

Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

- [A/HRC/37/58](#), January 2018, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; the rights of the child in relation to the environment.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

- [A/HRC/34/27](#), December 2016, Protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- [A/HRC/35/13](#), May 2017, Analytical study on the relationship between climate change and the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child: report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- [A/HRC/43/30](#), January 2020, Realising the rights of the child through a healthy environment - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- [A/HRC/49/23](#), July 2021, Full-day meeting of the Human Rights Council on the rights of the child. Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Children's rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Human Rights Council

- [A/HRC/RES/32/33](#), Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 1st of July 2016 32/33. Human rights and climate change.
- [A/HRC/RES/35/20](#), Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 22nd of June 2017. Human rights and climate change.
- [A/HRC/RES/45/30](#), Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 7th of October 2020. Children's rights: realising the rights of the child through a healthy environment.
- [A/HRC/RES/48/13](#), Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the 8th of October 2021. The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
- [A/HRC/40/L.22/Rev.1](#) Recognising the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Committee on the Rights of the Child

- Day of general discussion, [children's rights and the environment](#), 2016.
- [General Comment No.26](#), 2022-2023.
- [Committee decision](#) of September 2021 on the first individual communication submitted by 16 children.



Also relevant is the [Resolution adopted by the Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) and the [Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers](#) calling on governments to do the following:

- ➔ Work to enshrine the right to a healthy, clean, safe and sustainable environment as a human right in legal instruments at national (constitutions, law), European (in particular the European Convention on Human Rights and the revised European Social Charter) and international levels.
- ➔ Work together to define and recognise an international legal status to protect victims of forced migration due to climate change, including children and adolescents.
- ➔ Ensure that the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027 contains a reference to the impact of climate change and environmental threats on children's rights and that the related action plan promotes children's participation in addressing these challenges at different levels of government across Europe.
- ➔ Prioritise climate change adaptation policies which promote children's resilience to climate change and initiatives which improve their quality of life and health.
- ➔ Recognise children and adolescents as a driving force for change in the climate crisis by including children in decision-making and promoting their participation by introducing consultation mechanisms (e.g. advocacy activities, discussion forums, etc.).
- ➔ Safeguard the right of children and adolescents to information and education on environmental issues so that they can understand the challenges posed by the ecological crisis and climate change.



06 THE GLOBAL AGENDA REGARDING CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NEED TO INCLUDE A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

The issue of environmental protection, especially the need to address climate change, has become increasingly prominent on states' agendas since the 1970s. When the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change entered into force in 1994**, a multilateral and inter-state negotiation process began, with the aim of stabilising the level of dangerous greenhouse gases in the world's climate system. Almost all the world's countries, 197 in total, are parties to the convention and it represents a key milestone in decision-making on climate change and states' responsibilities.

The **Kyoto Protocol** continued the process begun with the UNFCCC. It was **adopted in 1997**, although due to the length of the ratification process it only entered into force in 2005. It established the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" and required that:

- ➔ Developed countries reduce their emissions by an average of 5% compared to 1990 levels in the five-year period from 2008 to 2012.
- ➔ A fund be established to help developing countries finance adaptation measures.

In 2015, 195 countries (including the two biggest polluters, China and the US) negotiated the **Paris Agreement**, a legally binding international climate change treaty which set specific targets for the end of this century:

- ➔ Keep the rise in mean global temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, preferably 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- ➔ Achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

According to the United Nations, *"the Paris Agreement is a milestone in the multilateral climate change process because, for the first time, a binding agreement brings all countries together under a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects"*.

The Paris Agreement was hailed as one of the most significant achievements in the history of the fight against climate change. However, the details of how the agreement would be implemented were not decided on in Paris. The **Conferences of the Parties (COPs)**⁴⁵, which have been held from 2016 onwards, have been and will continue to be the key arena where decisions are made regarding how the different aspects of the agreement will be implemented.

One of the most sensitive and criticised aspects of the entire multilateral COP process under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change **is the human rights- and child and adolescent rights-based approach**.

Civil society, young people, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Human Rights Council (HRC) continue to insist on the need to highlight the links between climate change and human rights. They call for a rights-based approach to global climate change policies and actions in discussions related to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The preamble to the UNFCCC Paris Agreement calls on states to take action to address climate change and to "respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights". However, this provision has not proven sufficient. While some human rights principles are included in the operational aspect of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement - a clearly positive result which is a direct consequence of years of advocacy by civil society as represented by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Human Rights - much remains to be done.

45. COP: The supreme decision-making body of the Convention. All State Parties are represented at the COP, at which they review the implementation of the Convention and any other legal instruments that the COP adopts.



Children and young people should be the real drivers of the COP. Following the Youth4Climate initiative in Milan, young people participated in COP 26 in Glasgow in order to be involved in the decisions which affect their future.

At the parallel event - 'The Climate Crisis - A Child Rights Crisis' - organised by UNICEF, representatives of the governments of Mexico, the Netherlands and Jamaica spoke with three young climate activists from Nigeria, Pakistan and Trinidad and Tobago. **This is a new addition to the political and institutional make-up of the COPs, which will hopefully be converted into a good practice so as to ensure a more inclusive process which sees young people at the forefront of climate action.**

Another advance worth mentioning occurred at COP25 in Madrid, where YOUNGO, a group representing young leaders and youth organisations from around the world, presented the [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#) to governments. This declaration calls for faster adoption and implementation of policies and more inclusive climate actions which focus on the rights of children and adolescents and involve young people in decision-making processes. **To date only 29 governments have signed the declaration.**

Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action

Under the declaration, states undertake to:

- ➔ Advocate for the **global recognition and fulfilment of children's inalienable right to a healthy environment.**
- ➔ Enhance efforts to respect, **promote and consider the rights of children and young people in implementation of the Paris Agreement at all levels.**
- ➔ **Scale up and accelerate investment in adaptation, disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures** which focus on children and young people, especially those most at risk.
- ➔ **Strengthen the capacity of children and young people on climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts** by establishing and investing in environmental and climate change education.
- ➔ **Enhance the meaningful participation of children and youth in climate change processes, including through the Action for Climate Empowerment dialogue, by participating in the Youth Delegate Programme at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and by supporting the YOUNGO Global South Youth Fellowship.**
- ➔ **Actively consider and explore measures to establish an international Commission for Children and Future Generations, as well as new or existing mechanisms at the national level to ensure the effective participation of children and youth in decision making on climate change.**
- ➔ **Adopt institutional and administrative measures, as well as partnerships, at national and international levels in order to actively pursue the above objectives, and to enhance coherence and a cross-cutting focus on children and youth in climate action.**

The need to move on from commitment to concrete action is urgent; it is time to implement the solutions which already exist and are available. Human rights and children's rights must be at the heart of climate action throughout this process. As the current High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has said, *"climate action must be guided by the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The principle of the best interests of the child must be at the centre of any policy"*.

There is a long road ahead, beginning with the next COP in Egypt in November 2022.



07 NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

EU framework

The framework for energy and climate policy in Spain is determined by the **European Union (EU)**, which in turn follows the requirements of the Paris Agreement.

In this context, in 2016 the **European Commission published the “Winter Package”** (Clean Energy for All Europeans) which has been implemented through various regulations and directives. The aim of these initiatives is to facilitate compliance with the principal binding targets of the EU for 2030, which are set out below:

- ➔ A 40% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to 1990.
- ➔ 32% of total gross final energy consumption to come from renewable sources.
- ➔ A 32.5% improvement in energy efficiency.
- ➔ 15% interconnection of electricity production in the member states.

In order for all EU Member States to meet these objectives in a coordinated manner, the Winter Package contains a **Governance Regulation, Regulation 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the 11th of December 2018**. This regulation sets out the process for creating plans to fulfil objectives and meet targets, ensuring the consistency, comparability and transparency of the information submitted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. It includes two important tools for establishing a framework for action on climate change:

- ➔ The **Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (INECP) 2021-2030**: The INECPs submitted by each member state will be used by the Commission to determine the overall level of compliance and to establish measures to correct potential shortcomings. It includes guarantees that the Plan will continue beyond 2030 with the development of a Long-Term Low Emission Strategy for 2050.
- ➔ The **long-term Decarbonisation Strategy** consists of a roadmap for a 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and will allow member states to define a path towards achieving climate neutrality - emitting no more than they absorb - no later than 2050.

In addition, on the 28th of November 2018 the **European Commission** updated its long-term strategic vision, **A Clean Planet for All**, for the European Union to become a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate-neutral economy by 2050.

Finally, at the EU level, the **European Commission** has just published a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability**, in which it recognises the crucial role of education and training for the green transition. The recommendation, still pending approval, states that learners of all ages should be able to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to live more sustainably, change their models of consumption and production, adopt healthier lifestyles and contribute, both individually and collectively, to the transformation of society. The recommendation aims to encourage member states to align all of their education and training strategies and curricula with environmental sustainability, including curricula, assessment techniques, instructional methods, and teacher training.



On the 21st of January 2020, the Council of Ministers approved the [Declaration of a Climate and Environmental Emergency](#) in response to the widespread consensus among the scientific community regarding the need for urgent action to safeguard the environment and the health and safety of citizens. The declaration sends a clear message about the need for action in all sectors of the economy as well as the need to protect biodiversity and natural resources. It consists of 30 measures including three new plans, five new laws and eight strategies.

Spanish Law 7/2021 on climate change and energy transition

In its session of the 13th of May 2021, Spain's Congress of Deputies approved [Law 7/2021 on climate change and energy transition](#), which has the following objectives:

- ➔ To ensure Spain complies with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.
- ➔ To facilitate the decarbonisation of the Spanish economy and its transition to a circular economy, ensuring the efficient and socially responsible use of resources.
- ➔ To encourage adaptation to the impacts of climate change and the implementation of a sustainable development model which creates fair employment and contributes to reducing inequality.

Law 7/2021 is [central to political action against climate change](#). It aims to ensure coordination between the policies of different sectors and that the Autonomous Communities can designate higher levels of protection than those which apply under state legislation. For the first time since Spain signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, a new regulatory framework has been developed with the aim of reversing the foreseeable threats of climate change.

The preamble to Law 7/201 states that Spain must focus on support and inclusivity for the groups most affected by climate change and the transformation of the economy, and [one of its key principles is “the protection of vulnerable groups, with special consideration for children”](#).





The Strategic Energy and Climate Framework

A **Strategic Energy and Climate Framework** was created to guide the implementation of Law 7/2021, involving the development of different strategic plans to ensure compliance with the commitments laid out in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, while also improving governance regarding the climate agenda. These plans include the following:

- ➔ **The Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (INECP) 2021-2030** (Article 4): A progress report must be submitted to the European Commission every two years. One of the fundamental principles which guided the preparation of Spain's INECP was energy efficiency as a key strategy to reduce CO2 emissions. The proposed measures are expected to result in a 39.5% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030, more than the 32.5% called for by the European Union in its Winter Package.
- ➔ **The National Strategy against Energy Poverty** (ENPE in the Spanish acronym): This strategy, approved in April 2019, is the framework for actions to be carried out as regards reducing energy poverty. The approach is designed to make use of benefits intended to provide relief, such as the social energy voucher - a short-term measure which is issued based on disposable income criteria - as well as other medium- and long-term measures to improve energy efficiency and self-consumption facilities, which are more structural and development-oriented.
- ➔ **The Decarbonisation Strategy for 2050** (Article 5): The objective of this strategy is to create a coherent and integrated response to the climate crisis, which takes advantage of opportunities for modernisation, improves economic competitiveness and is socially just and inclusive. It provides a roadmap for moving towards climate neutrality by 2050, with intermediate milestones in 2030 and 2040. Together with the INECP, this strategy promotes the development of renewable energies, greater energy autonomy, sustainable mobility and energy efficiency.
- ➔ **The National Climate Change Adaptation Plan** (PNACC in the Spanish acronym): This is a basic planning tool which promotes coordinated and coherent action in the face of the effects of climate change. It outlines the objectives, criteria, scope of operation and actions which are designed to foster resilience and adaptation to climate change and mitigate the associated public health risks.
- ➔ **The Just Transition Strategy** (Article 27): This strategy is implemented via the Just Transition Agreements, which include a comprehensive regional action plan for areas where the energy and ecological transition may hinder economic activity. It aims to optimise the benefits and minimise the risks the energy and ecological transition hold for the jobs market.
- ➔ **The Strategic Plan for Health and the Environment:** This plan was developed by the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO in the Spanish acronym) in coordination with the Ministry of Health (MSAN), with the aim of improving quality of life and conserving the environment by creating healthy living conditions and influencing the determinants of health. The plan recognises that there are different types of inequality which must be considered when analysing indicators, and that all planning must take into account socioeconomic position, income, region, age and gender.
- ➔ **The Environmental Education for Sustainability Action Plan** (PAEAS in the Spanish acronym): This is a strategic planning document which outlines Spain's objectives and action plans regarding Environmental Education for Sustainability (EES), to be implemented between 2021 and 2025 by the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO) and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP).



The [2030 Strategy](#) groups actions according to population, sector and theme. One of the main objectives of this strategy is the prioritisation of actions aimed at children (under fifteen years of age) in the health and education sectors and at the community level. There is a special focus on vulnerable children in accordance with one of the strategy's key principles: "leave no one behind". The actions are focused on two interconnected goals: sustainability and equality. The 2030 agenda also encompasses new measures for child well-being related to economic development, the environment and climate change, equality, protection and the promotion of peace. Ensuring children's rights are protected is a basic component of the Sustainable Development Goals⁴⁶.

In 2021, the Spanish government published the [Spain 2050](#) plan, which provides the foundation and outlines proposals for a long-term national strategy with the goal of making Spain a carbon neutral, sustainable and climate resilient society. The report highlights how we have overused natural resources and stresses that, if this situation continues, the negative effects will be irreversible and will have serious consequences for all living beings, some of which we are already witnessing. To achieve this overall objective, the plan sets out a series of specific aims and initiatives.



46. *Construyendo el futuro: La Infancia y la Agenda de Desarrollo Sostenible 2030 en España.*
(Building the future: Children and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Spain), UNICEF Spain.



08 SPAIN'S BIGGEST CHALLENGES AS REGARDS CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILDREN

Scientific evidence has shown that the consequences of climate change violate several of the children's rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties.

The climate agenda and the children's agenda must go hand in hand. We cannot guarantee children's rights without effective measures to curb climate change, and the best way to move towards sustainability is to guarantee children's rights. Children's right to a healthier and more sustainable life can be a driver of the sustainability agenda.

Below we discuss the biggest challenges which need be addressed in order to ensure children's right to a healthy environment in Spain, one of the countries most affected by climate change in Europe according to experts. In addressing these challenges, it is vital to consider the most vulnerable children, those who are most exposed to the risks and problems associated with the environmental crisis.





➔ 8.1 The visible impact of environmental degradation and climate change on children

It is important that States carry out impartial and independent assessments of the effects of climate change on the rights of children and adolescents, and that they use the results to develop campaigns which incorporate a child-centred approach from the beginning.

However, the absence of any specific analysis or data on the many facets of the impact of climate change on children in Spain makes it difficult to design effective public policies and raise awareness in society.

Furthermore, according to recent reports, “women and girls face greater risks and burdens associated with climate change, due to conditions of poverty, but also due to gender roles and cultural norms”⁴⁷. It is therefore essential to include a gender perspective when collecting and analysing information.



➔ 8.2 Effective measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Protecting children from the negative impact of climate change necessarily includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Spain is the EU's fourth largest economy; it and five other EU countries account for around 72% of the continent's total greenhouse gas emissions⁴⁸.

Spain needs to be more ambitious in its commitments regarding reducing emissions. To achieve this reduction, all appropriate mitigation and adaptation policies need to be implemented, at all administrative levels, such as promoting renewable energies, decreasing waste production, increasing green areas, changes in city mobility policies, etc.

It is essential that these processes take into consideration communities which may be forced to migrate, as they will lose access to their raw materials or the lands they own, which in many cases represent their livelihood. This energy transition must focus on social justice and have a direct impact on the lives of children and their communities.

47. Report: *Informe Género y Cambio Climático* (Gender and Climate Change), Ministry of Equality, 2020.

48. Article: Climate Change, Greenpeace.



➔ 8.3 The focus on children in different environmental policies

In 2019, Spain signed the [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#), which represented a significant commitment to include children and young people in climate policy and action, emphasising the need for these groups to be part of the decision-making process.

Since then, the main policy tools have recognised children as an especially vulnerable group, albeit without going into further detail. Spanish Law 7/2021 includes the principle of “protection of vulnerable groups, with special consideration for children” and its articles lay out a series of commitments which are directly linked to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The [National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change \(PNACC\)](#) 2021-2030 also makes reference to responsibility as regards future generations.

However, the expression of this commitment to children must be accompanied by concrete measures. The different laws and policies which are approved need to focus on children, and before making any decision an evaluation must be carried out regarding how it will affect children and have a positive impact on the exercise of their rights. As such, it is important that the drafting and implementation of laws, especially at the local level, incorporates this focus on children.



The [principle of intergenerational justice](#) was a consideration in the ruling of the German Constitutional Court in April 2021, which declared the German Climate Change Act partially unconstitutional for violating the fundamental rights of young people and future generations through its lack of ambition regarding the climate. The ruling stated that any actions taken must emphasise the moral aspects of intergenerational risks and be guided in their ethics by the need for fair and sustainable management of natural resources.



➔ 8.4 Children's participation in decision-making and governance mechanisms

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all existing international standards, make it clear that states must guarantee children's right to be heard and to freely express their views on all national and regional efforts to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Children and adolescents must be viewed as significant stakeholders in processes for making decisions regarding the care and democratic use of the shared assets which they need (and future generations will need) to live their lives: the atmosphere, food, energy sources, etc.

In recent years, children and young people have taken on a central role in demanding that their right to a healthy environment be respected, and they have become key agents of change in the climate cause. Their participation in peaceful protests, climate events and the creation of materials which they have presented to different national and international bodies has been essential in ensuring children are considered a particularly vulnerable group in the fight against climate change.

However, despite this increase in recognition, public forums for debate on environmental issues do not currently give enough consideration to children's voices.

As such, social-ecological education is essential in order for participation to be effective and substantial; without information, without a critical attitude, and without children's participation in evaluations, it will be difficult to enable their participation in decision-making and governance mechanisms.

The Plan International report "Reimagining Climate Action: a vision of youth education and participation"⁴⁹ is based on surveys of more than 1,800 adolescents and young people aged 15-24 from 37 countries, including Spain. According to the report, 45% of Spanish adolescents surveyed were extremely or very concerned about climate change, the majority have taken action at some level to combat climate change, and 64% were interested in participating in formal decision-making processes as regards climate policies.

According to the survey data, most adolescents and young people in Spain learned what they know about climate change at school (66%), mostly in natural science classes (42%). Such classes do not cover key issues related to the climate emergency, such as rights and justice, gender equality and the intergenerational dimension, which need to be addressed from a much broader societal perspective. Furthermore, 24% of adolescents and young people rated their climate change education as "poor" or "very poor".

The clear picture is that adolescents and young people have received little information about policy and climate action processes, even though they would like to be able to participate in them. 58% of those who participated in the survey did not know what the Paris Agreement was, and 87% of the adolescents and young people surveyed knew nothing, very little or only a little about climate policies, processes and strategies in Spain. 64% of Spanish young people surveyed would like to participate in climate policy processes, but only 2% have done so.

In 2019, Spain signed the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action, committing to accelerate efforts to ensure the inclusion of children and young people in climate policies and action, and recognising the need for them to be part of the decision-making process. The recently passed Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy Transition stipulates that all groups in society should participate in climate change adaptation policies. It makes no specific mention of children, but does recognise the need to integrate groups which are affected, i.e., children's organisations.

For this participation to be effective and substantial, it is essential that existing child participation organisations at all levels be consulted in decision-making processes. In addition, children need to be integrated into the governance mechanisms which are created.

49. Reimaginar la ACCIÓN climática: Una visión de la educación y la participación juvenil (Reimagining Climate Action: a vision of youth education and participation), Plan Internacional, 2021.



➔ 8.5 Schools and their surroundings as safe and sustainable spaces for children

The way our cities are designed, and the model they are based upon, prioritises transport in private vehicles. This has a direct impact on the lives and rights of children, especially on their health and development. In big cities, children walking to school or simply playing in the street unaccompanied by adults is dangerous and unwise, and has a negative impact on their health.

Children spend a large portion of their time at school. Ensuring clean air in schools and their surroundings is vital in order to guarantee their right to health and to a quality education. According to worrying findings from recent studies in Barcelona and Madrid, at 9am almost all preschools and day care centres exceed CO2 alert levels⁵⁰.

Solutions need to be found to ensure that schools and their surroundings, roads and access routes are not only safe from an accident prevention point of view, but are healthy and help children develop to their full potential.

13% of hospital admissions in Madrid for respiratory causes are related to traffic intensity. 39% of hospital admissions due to circulatory problems are related to traffic intensity⁵¹.

50. Article: *¿Qué aire respiran los niños de Madrid y Barcelona?* (What air are the children in Madrid and Barcelona breathing?).

51. Direct assessment of health impacts on hospital admission from traffic intensity in Madrid 2020.



For years, initiatives such as Entornos escolares seguros y saludables (Safe and Healthy School Environments)⁵², Revuelta Sostenible al Cole (Sustainable School Revolution)⁵³, and Revuelta escolar (Student Revolution)⁵⁴, have been working towards this goal and urging governments to take action. The main risks they want addressed are the following:

- ➔ **Safety:** the predominance of motorised transport is detrimental to safety (road accidents are still one of the main causes of death in children under 15, and in recent years approximately 1,800 pedestrians in this age group have been involved in accidents in urban areas).
- ➔ **Lack of respect for the rules of the road:** violations of traffic regulations around schools, such as double parking, parking on footpaths and pedestrian crossings, etc. are common and can endanger children.
- ➔ **Difficulties playing and developing their independence:** The right to play, vital for children's development and enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is threatened by unsafe school surroundings and because the perception of danger results in overprotection and constant adult supervision of children. This impedes their learning and the acquisition of numerous skills which are essential for physical development and the maturation of basic psychological skills: social skills, problem solving, spatial orientation, perception of efficacy, self-care, self-confidence, etc.

- ➔ **Obesity and overweight:** Obesity and overweight are closely linked to a sedentary lifestyle and not getting exercise on a daily basis; for children this should include getting to school and physical activity around the neighbourhood. It is important to note that Spain has the highest rates of child overweight and obesity in Europe and that these issues have very negative effects on children's physical, social and emotional health. The Spanish Paediatric Association promotes the [Caminando al Cole \(Walking to School\)](#) programme to tackle the various problems caused by sedentary lifestyles in children.
- ➔ **Exposure to air pollution:** Children are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of air pollution. A recent study in the city of Barcelona⁵⁵ showed that, although children spend only 6% of their time walking outdoors, 20% of their total daily absorption of air pollutants takes place during this time (the rest happens at home (35%) and at school (30%)).
- ➔ **Exposure to noise:** Noise has a serious impact on children's health. Many studies have found an association between noise pollution and irreversible hearing loss,⁵⁶ impairments in learning, attention span and other cognitive abilities, behavioural issues, mental health problems such as depression and stress, and, in very extreme situations, even hormonal disturbances, including diabetes and strokes.

- ➔ **Heat island and urban greenery:** So-called 'urban heat islands', a consequence of atmospheric pollution caused by vehicles and industrial activities, asphalt streets which retain heat and make the ground impermeable, and buildings being so close together, thus preventing heat from being released, together with the lack of green spaces (parks, trees) and blue spaces (sea, rivers, ponds, fountains), lead to temperature rises which can have serious effects on health, especially for children and the elderly. School playgrounds, which contain increasingly more asphalt and less natural spaces, worsen the situation that schools have to face at the beginning and end of the school year due to the lengthening of the summer and increasingly frequent heatwaves.

It is also important to note that schools are the perfect place to put into practice actions which, in addition to benefiting the environment, contribute to social-ecological education and the instillation of fundamental habits from a very early age: sustainable consumption and eating, recycling, etc. The best way to learn about the natural environment and how to respect it is through the example set at school, which can also help spread knowledge of effective and innovative practices.

52. Initiative promoted by the Seminar on Children and the Environment sponsored by the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge. Manifiesto Entorno Escolares (School Environments Manifesto), 2020.

53. Seminar on children's mobility, *Confederación Española de Asociaciones de Madres y Padres del alumnado* (Spanish Confederation of Parents' Associations).

54. Manifiesto Revueltas Escolares (Student Revolutions Manifesto), 2020.

55. BREATHE Study: Brain Air School Investigation.

56. Make Listening Safe, WHO, 2015.



➔ 8.6 Social-ecological education

Social-ecological education is an essential tool for the development of social skills and the creation of a collective awareness of the present and future consequences of environmental degradation; it is a means to impart the necessary tools for us to face present and future challenges related to environmental degradation.

The crisis we face requires a transformation which tackles its causes and acknowledges the limits of our planet; this cannot be achieved without a society-wide change of mentality, which must begin in childhood in order to be truly systematic.

Social-ecological education can drive more participatory processes and social mobilisation while instilling the resilience children will need to adapt to the changes that they will undergo throughout their lives. It is essential to emphasise the importance of issues such as knowledge of natural cycles and co-dependency, the democratic management of shared assets, education for participation and learning from community practice.

The LOMLOE (the Spanish Organic Law which modifies the Education Law) represents a significant advance in this area with respect to the previous education law, in that the curriculum now provides a more systematic approach to these topics. One of its objectives is to adapt the school curriculum to the context of the environmental crisis we are living through and to make a firm commitment to education for sustainability.

Beyond an analysis of the technical content of the LOMLOE and the Royal Decrees on Minimum Primary Education and Compulsory Secondary Education, and the potential improvements,⁵⁷ it is clear that now is the time to deliver on the promise of educating pupils to protect and care for

the natural environment. It is essential that the different Autonomous Communities, and the schools themselves, do not lose sight of the importance of this issue when it comes to planning schedules, assigning resources and teacher training. Furthermore, this education must be experiential and adapted to each age group, so that the importance of caring for the environment is internalised in a natural way.

It is also important to maintain a gender approach. Climate change, teachers' work, gender equality and the eradication of poverty are intrinsically linked; we need to encourage all children to participate and lead, but especially girls. This is necessary for a just ecological transition based on training and skills development in green jobs, which will result in benefits in terms of mitigation, adaptation and development. This transition is an opportunity to advance gender equality by breaking down stereotypes and norms that begin in early childhood and carry on through adolescence and into adulthood, influencing career paths. The low proportion of adolescent girls and young women on STEM training pathways may limit their access to training in skills which would enable them to work in green jobs. This is evident in the renewable energy industry, a sector with a high gender imbalance in which women account for only 20-25% of the global workforce and are often limited to financial, administrative or human resources roles.

At the EU level, the [European Commission has just published a proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability](#), in which it recognises the crucial role of education and training for the green transition. The recommendation, still pending approval, states that learners of all ages should be able to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to live more sustainably, change their models of consumption and production, adopt healthier lifestyles and contribute, both individually and collectively, to the transformation of society. The recommendation aims to encourage member states to fully adapt their education and training strategies and curricula, including teachers' professional development, curricula, and teaching and assessment techniques, so that they take environmental sustainability into consideration.

57. *El conocimiento y la defensa del medio natural en la LOMLOE* (Knowledge and defence of the natural environment in the LOMLOE.). FUHEM 2021.



➔ 8.7 Transport policies which put children first

Cities' transport policies, which are key to tackling climate change, must ensure that they put children first. Most air pollution in cities comes from traffic emissions, meaning a complete overhaul of the current transport model is necessary. Children's rights must be part of this overhaul.

Low-emission zones

Law 7/2021 stipulates in its articles that municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants and the island territories must establish low-emission zones by 2023, with the aim of reducing final energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. The law targets urban and metropolitan transport, aiming to increase the use of the most efficient modes while reducing the use of low-occupancy private vehicles. The aim is to promote shared use, as well as modes of transport which do not consume energy, such as walking and cycling.

Among the measures which will make the development of low-emission zones possible are the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, which will be implemented by local government, and the pending Sustainable Transport and Public Transport Financing Act, which will comprehensively address the needs of society in the face of new models and requirements related to transport.

As part of the push to establish low-emission zones, specific criteria to improve air quality around schools, healthcare facilities and other areas frequented by vulnerable people need to be defined and applied. This public policy will require the participation and cooperation of citizens and will represent significant progress; it is vital that schools are prioritised when specific measures to improve air quality are adopted and that other important places for children such as sports facilities and children's parks and playgrounds are also included.

Public transport

Many families choose private transport as their main means of getting around the city. In fact, since the pandemic began, the fear of new infections has led many families to stop using public transport and are using private vehicles instead, causing major traffic jams and high CO2 emissions, especially in areas close to schools⁵⁸.

This preference for excessive use of fossil fuel-powered motorised vehicles is the main cause of global warming. The combustion of fossil fuels emits gases such as carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and others which contribute to the greenhouse effect, acid rain, and air, soil and water pollution⁵⁹. In fact, traffic is the cause of half of the emissions recorded in urban centres, with more than 90 per cent of these emissions coming from cars and motorcycles⁶⁰.

Increased use of other means of transport would reduce carbon dioxide and monoxide emissions. Public transport is key to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. For example, buses generate up to 5.5 times less emissions in terms of passenger per kilometre than private vehicles⁶¹.

Families' use of public transport, in addition to reducing damage to the environment, encourages healthier lifestyle habits such as walking, which fosters a sense of autonomy in the city. As such, it is essential to encourage and promote the use of public transport, especially options powered by renewable energy, and to ensure an adequate transport network exists in all urban and rural areas.

It is important to note that public transport pricing policies do not include reduced fares for children and adolescents. Generally, the municipalities contemplate price reductions for young and elderly people as well as some age brackets more focused on early childhood.



58. Air Pollution and Child Health: Prescribing Clean Air, WHO, 2018.

59. Thomson Reuters Foundation. Research, 2018.

60. European Environment Agency.

61. Alsa Environmental Strategy.



➔ 8.8 Sustainable food

The connection between the right to healthy food and climate change is two-fold. On the one hand, children's food security and access to clean water is being threatened by climate change. On the other hand, food production is responsible for 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

It is especially important to encourage and promote children's consumption of fresh, local and seasonal food, with a wide range of measures and at all levels of government. The consumption of imported food, which has to travel long distances, causes extensive greenhouse gas emissions and therefore contributes to increased pollution. In addition, processed products generate waste and require energy to produce.

According to the WHO⁶², only four out of ten children in Europe eat fresh fruit every day, and only two out of ten eat vegetables every day. These figures are even lower in the case of Spanish households. The report found that, contrary to the recommendations of experts, only 29% of children in Spain eat fruit on a daily basis and only one in ten eats vegetables on a daily basis.

In addition to reducing carbon footprints and positively affecting sustainability in general, the promotion of sustainable food will improve children's health by helping reduce the high rates of childhood obesity in Spain (23.25 per cent of boys and 23.7 per cent of girls between six and nine years of age are obese) and of other diseases. According to the WHO, insufficient intake of fruit and vegetables causes approximately 19% of gastrointestinal

cancers, 31% of cases of coronary artery disease and 11% of strokes worldwide⁶³.

As such, it is essential to ensure school canteens serve sustainable food. A number of studies have pointed out that many Autonomous Communities opt for catering services or pre-packaged lunches in school canteens, to the detriment of school kitchens. This means that school meals travel on prepared trays from industrial kitchens, usually from industrial estates on the outskirts of cities⁶⁴, or even from other Autonomous Communities. In fact, the 2019 ALADINO report⁶⁵ stated that only half of schools have their own food service while the rest employ external food services, a trend that has been increasing in recent years.

School canteens are not only essential for ensuring adequate food for children living in poverty and reducing levels of childhood obesity, they can also have a major impact in the fight against climate change. Using local and fresh food products reduces emissions, but can also have a knock-on effect in terms of instilling good habits in children.

Similarly, **it is important to promote breastfeeding, which also has a positive impact on the sustainability of the planet**. Breastfeeding is a sustainable, safe, healthy, viable, non-polluting and non-resource consuming source of nutrition and sustenance. Breast milk does not need to be manufactured, packaged or transported. It reduces paper waste, land degradation and pollution caused by greenhouse gases (SDGs 7, 12 and 13.^{66, 67, 68}). In addition,

breastfeeding means less animal milk production, which increases pressure on natural resources and contributes to increased carbon emissions. (SDG15)⁶⁹.

Breastfeeding is the first act which influences children's physical health. In the short term, it forms the basis of healthy nutrition, preventing childhood obesity and reducing the risk of pneumonia, severe diarrhoea, otitis, sudden infant death syndrome and allergies, and in the long term, it leads to better health in adulthood. Furthermore, protecting and promoting breastfeeding is an ideal way to support sustainable development, in order to improve not only life on the planet today, but also the lives of future generations: breastfeeding comes at no cost to the family economy (SDG 1)⁷⁰, provides high quality and appropriate nutrients at every stage of child development (SDG 2)⁷¹, improves physical health and fosters healthy emotional relationships (SDG 3)⁷², and contributes to mental and cognitive development (SDG 4)⁷³.

62. A Snapshot of European Children's Eating Habits: results from round four of the European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative, WHO, 2015-2017.

63. The Impact of Climate Change on Children in Spain, 2017, UNICEF.

64. The Impact of Climate Change on Children in Spain, 2017, UNICEF.

65. *Estudio sobre la alimentación, Actividad Física, Desarrollo Infantil y Obesidad en España* (A Study of Diet, Physical Activity, Development and Obesity in Children in Spain), ALADINO report, 2019.

66. Linnecar A, et al. Formula for Disaster. IBFAN Asia/BPNI; 2014.

67. Renfrew, M.J. et al. Preventing disease and saving resources: the potential contribution of increasing breastfeeding rates in the UK. UNICEF UK. 2012.

68. Report on Carbon Footprints Due to Milk Formula.

69. Rollins NC et al. Why invest, and what it will take to improve breastfeeding practices? The Lancet 2016.

70. Victoria, Cesar G. et al. Breastfeeding in the 21st century, mechanisms and lifelong effect. The Lancet, 2016.

71. Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries. Black RE. Et al. The Lancet, 2013.

72. Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries. Black RE. Et al. The Lancet, 2013.

73. Horta BL, de Mola CL, Victora CG. Breastfeeding and intelligence: systematic review and meta-analysis. Acta Paediatr Suppl 2015.



➔ 8.9 Promoting green spaces in cities

Green spaces in cities (public and private parks, lawns, home and community gardens, playgrounds, etc.) have clear benefits for children's health; they reduce the risks associated with diseases such as lung cancer and respiratory diseases, and mitigate the effects of heat islands, thereby lowering the temperature in cities. In addition, green spaces help people be more active, especially children and adolescents⁷⁴.

A lack of green spaces also has a negative effect on children's mental health. According to a number of studies⁷⁵, children who grow up with the fewest green spaces have up to 55% more risk of developing a psychiatric disorder, regardless of the effects of other known risk factors.

But the benefits go far beyond this. Green spaces allow for more development of creative play, facilitating learning. Contact with nature reduces stress levels and is beneficial for personal development and social relationships. It also raises children's awareness of the importance of protecting nature.

According to a number of studies⁷⁶, 82% of Spanish children do not play more than an hour a day in open spaces as is recommended. Children need contact with nature. The so-called **Nature-deficit disorder**⁷⁷ which can result due to a lack of interaction with the natural environment has numerous negative effects on children, as such interaction is fundamental to our well-being.

Children need direct contact with nature in order to ensure optimal social, emotional and physical development⁷⁸. However, this is not an easy to achieve in our cities, which are designed to facilitate traffic and where 80% of public space is designated for cars.

According to a study by ISGlobal⁷⁹, 62% of people (in the locations studied) live in places with less access to green spaces than the WHO recommendation. In the study's ranking of European cities with the highest mortality rates are due to lack of green spaces, nine Spanish cities are in the top 100. The report found that in Madrid and Barcelona between 350 and 400 deaths per year could be prevented if the cities followed the WHO recommendation that everyone, wherever they live, should have an accessible green space of at least two hectares in size, no more than 300m (measured in a straight line) from home⁸⁰.

It is important to note that the most vulnerable population groups tend to live in neighbourhoods with few green spaces compared to neighbourhoods where higher socio-economic status groups live. According to UNICEF, in many cities children who live in better-off areas have nine times more access to green spaces than children who live in disadvantaged areas⁸¹. It follows that increasing green spaces in the most crowded population centres would help to reduce inequalities in various demographic measures⁸².

It is equally important not to forget children and adolescents who live in rural areas. While studies show

that most children growing up in rural areas have far more contact with nature than their urban counterparts⁸³, the absence of public services means that they have to spend considerable time each day in a bus or car in order to get to school⁸⁴.

In addition to green spaces, it is also important to consider "blue spaces", which have the potential to help counteract the effects of rising temperatures. Blue spaces are areas with fountains, ponds, swimming pools or, in other environments, rivers, lakes or sea. Creating such spaces can help mitigate or reduce the impact of extreme temperatures and heat islands. Children can also spend leisure time in blue spaces and engage in play activities connected to their surroundings which thus involve direct contact with nature.

74. Green spaces: An Invaluable Resource for Delivering Sustainable Urban Health. UN.

75. Residential green space in childhood is associated with lower risk of psychiatric disorders from adolescence into adulthood, PNAS, 2019.

76. AIJU Guide 3.0.

77. Term coined by Richard Louv in his book "The Last Children in the Forest", 2005.

78. AIJU Guide 3.0.

79. Ranking of cities, ISGlobal.

80. Urban green spaces and health, WHO, 2016.

81. The impact of climate change on children in Spain, UNICEF, 2017.

82. Green Spaces: An Invaluable Resource for Delivering Sustainable Urban Health. UN.

83. The Necessity of Urban Green Space for Children's Optimal Development, 2020, UNICEF.

84. Playing in the street to save the planet. Article 2021.



➔ 8.10 Energy poverty

One of the main effects of climate change is the increase in extreme heatwaves and cold waves. 8.5% of children under the age of eighteen suffer from energy poverty, meaning 703,500 children and adolescents live in households which cannot afford to keep their homes at a comfortable temperature⁸⁵. The percentage of households with children who cannot keep their homes at a comfortable temperature has risen from 9.5% in 2019 to 17.9% in 2020⁸⁶. Furthermore, rising electricity prices disproportionately affect the most vulnerable households.

Children are particularly vulnerable in these situations for physiological reasons. Living in a poorly heated home can affect different aspects of children's lives, from increasing the likelihood of illness and respiratory problems and resulting in higher rates of hospital admissions, to impacting on their well-being and school performance. A number of studies have found that children living in homes which are too cold are up to twice as likely to suffer from respiratory illnesses as those living in houses that are warm enough⁸⁷.

As such, children living in poverty, in housing in poor condition and with poor energy efficiency, are most affected. In addition, families affected by energy poverty are forced, especially in cold weather, to spend a large portion of what little income they may have on heating their homes, leaving less to spend on food and therefore affecting the quality of their children's nutrition.

Given this context, it is worrying that of the four indicators the **National Energy Poverty Strategy** (ENPE in the Spanish acronym) uses to measure energy poverty, none expressly mention or prioritise households with dependent children. The increased vulnerability of children, and the violation of their rights that comes with not having adequate housing, has not been taken into account.

This means that retrofitting housing in Spain represents a double opportunity; improving buildings' energy efficiency helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thus helping the environment, and also tackles energy poverty. Retrofitting housing reduces energy consumption, helping the most vulnerable families avoid high energy bills and keep their homes at a comfortable temperature at very little cost.

The Clean Energy for All Europeans package approved by the European Union recommends prioritising energy-saving retrofits for households affected by energy poverty. It also states that energy poverty is a major challenge throughout the EU and is rooted in low incomes and energy-inefficient housing. It urges Member States to tackle energy poverty at its root, through targeted social policies and energy efficiency measures such as the insulation of homes affected by energy poverty and social housing.



85. Analysis of the survey of living conditions from the perspective of children, 2020.

86. EAPN (2020). 11th Report on the State of Poverty in Spain, 2020.

87. The Impact of Climate Change on Children in Spain, 2017, UNICEF.



09 PROPOSALS

1. Make compliance with the **Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action** a priority on the political agenda and establish mechanisms to monitor compliance.

2. **Ensure children participate** in decision-making and the governance mechanisms which are part of the **environment agenda**, and **look to create stable platforms for participation**.

3. **Improve knowledge of the impact of environmental degradation and climate change on children:**

- ➔ Conduct a study, with the participation of children, on the impact of climate change on children's rights.
- ➔ Publish the results and conduct awareness-raising campaigns.
- ➔ Establish a data collection and analysis system, ordered by age, gender, socio-economic status and disability, to increase understanding of the reality of the impact of environmental degradation on children.
- ➔ Establish a system to analyse the impact of programmes and laws related to climate change and children, and analyse the budget allocated to these actions.
- ➔ Conduct awareness-raising campaigns on environmental noise reduction in educational, leisure and recreational settings.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ Conduct campaigns to raise awareness of the need to buy and consume less.
- ➔ Create more initiatives etc. in shopping centres to encourage recycling, such as bins which give you money for your waste which you can then spend in the shops.
- ➔ Ensure that 20% of media advertisements are designated to promoting the positive environmental impact of different green companies and initiatives.



4. Increase the current commitment to reduce emissions (by 23% by 2030 compared to 1990) to 55% in order to make a proportionate contribution towards avoiding global warming of 1.5°C (the target under the Paris Agreement).

5. Implement effective climate change mitigation measures at all levels of government, such as the promotion of renewable energies, waste prevention and management, sustainable agricultural production methods, etc.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ Use state subsidies to promote the use of electric vehicles and related products and services, in order to encourage consumers to buy more environmentally friendly forms of transport.
- ➔ Promote the use of renewable energies (solar panels, wind energy, tidal energy, etc.) in private homes by reducing the cost involved in buying and maintaining them.
- ➔ Build wind farms nationwide, taking care to minimise adverse effects for the local community.
- ➔ Replace most (or all) fossil fuels used in Spain with clean and renewable energies, and reduce the use of aerosols.
- ➔ Reduce VAT on organic products, with the goal of promoting the concept of slow living (living in harmony with nature and prioritising mental and physical health) among young people and society as a whole, thereby reducing ecological poverty.
- ➔ Increase the prices of polluting products.
- ➔ Support a circular economy in all sectors of the national economy and in all of the above proposals. Products which respect the principles of circular economy should have labels to positively differentiate them from those which don't.
- ➔ Enforce change in the most polluting companies in Spain by eliminating tax benefits and raising taxes.
- ➔ Increase budgetary spending on local rubbish collection with immediate effect.
- ➔ Impose fines on people who use polluting materials or dump waste in streets, rivers or the sea.



6. Incorporate a children's rights approach into all legislation and policies deriving from Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy Transition and other laws which affect children's rights, with special emphasis on policies which affect children in particular, such as:

- ➔ Regional plans for the retrofitting of housing; households with dependent children should be prioritised as part of the strategy to combat energy poverty.
- ➔ The Spanish Royal Decree on the Establishment of Low Emission Zones and the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans should incorporate a children's perspective when establishing low emission zones.

This means including places where children gather; schools, playgrounds, sports facilities and leisure and play areas must be treated as particularly sensitive places when it comes to implementing measures.

- ➔ Ensure the state strategy to combat energy poverty designates families with dependent children a priority group, in order to make certain that they are beneficiaries of the social energy voucher and housing retrofit programs.

7. Ensure **new urban development plans** incorporate a children's rights approach, paying special attention to the creation and maintenance of green spaces and other areas which help fulfil children's rights, and the construction or improvement of facilities which help reduce the impact of heat such as water fountains, public swimming pools, and other blue spaces.

Plans should also take into account the particular needs of those who live in the poorest areas and are thus especially vulnerable; they must also have access to and be able to enjoy these spaces.

The planning phase should also involve local communities, including children and adolescents.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ Create a regulation under which new streets in municipalities and cities in Spain must leave enough space on pavements to plant trees in order to offset CO2 emissions from cars.
- ➔ Build green housing with underground car parks (with electric chargers for vehicles which use them) and introduce regulations to make roof garden areas compulsory.
- ➔ Promote reforestation with species which are native to Spain and implement legislation to construct green structures based around trees (including bird nests and ensuring respect for the local ecosystem).
- ➔ Design houses and office buildings which require less energy to heat and cool.
- ➔ Introduce government subsidies for the creation of green spaces in Spain's municipalities and cities.
- ➔ Increase surveillance at beaches to ensure people care for them and impose penalties on those who do not. Develop initiatives and conduct beach cleanliness campaigns.



8. Ensure that schools and their surroundings are made safe and healthy for children, in line with the Manifesto on making schools and their environments healthier for children.

The relevant administrations need to seize the opportunity presented by **Recovery Funds** to develop projects which will transform schools, turning them into them key components of the fight against climate change while contributing to the fulfilment of children's rights.

On school premises:

- ➔ Replace parking areas within school grounds with playgrounds or other spaces which can be used by children.
- ➔ Develop or designate safe parking areas for bicycles, skateboards and scooters on or near all school premises to encourage the use of active mobility for travel to school.
- ➔ Make school playgrounds more natural, with trees and plants which add shade and colour while keeping them cooler, improving air quality and dampening noise.

Around schools and at their entrances:

- ➔ Limit parking and traffic in the surrounding streets, especially close to school entrances.
- ➔ Strictly enforce traffic regulations at the times when students are arriving and leaving in order to ensure that the surrounding area is safe and respectful.
- ➔ Prioritise pedestrians and cyclists' mobility on the roads and streets around schools and create car-free access routes; promote the presence of vegetation, water features and public recreation, gathering and play areas.

Proposed measures for urban planning around schools:

- ➔ Ensure measures to promote safe and healthy school environments are included in the Municipal Urban Development Plan (POUM in the Spanish acronym).
- ➔ Ensure specific measures to limit and calm traffic around schools are included in the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (PMUS in the Spanish acronym).
- ➔ Promote widespread adaptation of the "City 30" model to reduce traffic speeds on all urban roads.

School zoning

- ➔ Proximity to a school should be a basic criterion for delimiting school districts; this would benefit children and communities, reversing the implementation of the "single school zone" which has contributed to the increase in daily travel in motorised vehicles.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ More recycling bins (especially in playgrounds) in schools and universities; teachers should supervise recycling to ensure it is done correctly and that no rubbish is thrown on the ground, and that should set a good example.
- ➔ More ashtrays on litter bins in the streets, especially near bars.
- ➔ Check what material litter bins are made of and if necessary replace them with bins made from metal or other materials.
- ➔ Sell products with skin or shells or which generate waste (such as snack bags of nuts and seeds) together with an empty bag to store the waste in so it won't be thrown on the ground.



9. Regarding social-ecological education:

- ➔ Fully implement the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development.
- ➔ Increase funding for the transformation of curricula - both their content and implementation - and teacher training to support climate justice and care for the environment.
- ➔ Develop plans for the education sector which include a gender perspective and which prioritise resilience, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and sustainable development, in line with SDG target 4.7.
- ➔ Include education for gender equality in all national climate strategies, such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and the improvement and implementation of Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE).
- ➔ Encourage the participation and leadership of children, but especially girls and young people, in a just ecological transition through skills development and training in green jobs, which will result in important benefits in terms of mitigation, adaptation and development.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ Include a compulsory subject in the Education System aimed at making the climate crisis more visible among children and young people. To this end, we propose setting up partnerships among international associations and institutions in order to promote interculturality and the sharing of ideas regarding the difficulties of the Climate Crisis.
- ➔ Promote activities in schools for collecting waste and caring for local flora and fauna.
- ➔ Encourage *slow living* (living in harmony with nature and prioritising mental and physical health) through different activities and campaigns to raise awareness of the role of young people in the climate crisis, and propose meetings where young people can develop initiatives. At these meetings, teach actions which are based on organisational practices.
- ➔ Propose subjects related to recycling and care for the environment.



10. Promote and encourage the use of public transport, ensuring a child-friendly approach is factored into the future Law on Sustainable Mobility and Transport Funding. The following are particularly important:

- ➔ Ensure efficient and accessible public transport networks with sufficient resources in cities and rural areas, guaranteeing access to public transport for the most vulnerable children living in socially excluded areas, and eliminate the obstacles faced by many families with children when using public transport, such as limited space for buggies.
- ➔ Conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the benefits of using public transport.
- ➔ Guarantees a price deduction for all children under 18 years of age.
- ➔ Promote and extend bicycle lanes in cities, with the aim of improving air quality by reducing emissions of pollutants.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ Build more High-Speed Train Networks and encourage people to use them as opposed to other more polluting modes of transport, such as cars and airplanes.
- ➔ Improve public transport and reduce prices so that it becomes the most used option, along with alternative modes of transport such as cycling, skateboarding, etc.

11. Promote sustainable and healthy eating for all children and adolescents:

- ➔ Promote the consumption of fresh, local and seasonal food by children.
- ➔ Ensure the food served in school canteens is sustainable and healthy, prioritising school kitchens over catering services and the use of local and seasonal products, with the aim of reducing emissions from food transport and ensuring a balanced diet for children.
- ➔ Promote and encourage breastfeeding as healthy for children and sustainable for the planet.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ Require that all food products carry a (large and conspicuous) label which clearly states where they come from and how they have been produced.
- ➔ Encourage children and young people (through awareness-raising campaigns and advertising on social networks) to consume local and seasonal products.
- ➔ Carry out more inspections and monitoring of fruit and vegetable farms, and find ways to regulate how they grow their produce in order to minimise potential damage to our health.
- ➔ Introduce a law to ensure that the palm oil in imported products is made using sustainable agriculture techniques.



12. Support developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and fragile contexts, through adaptation and impact mitigation mechanisms in the countries which have contributed least to the climate crisis and where most children and adolescents will suffer the worst effects.



Children and adolescents' proposals

- ➔ Conduct research in the regions of the world which are most affected by a lack of safe drinking water and use it to create projects and campaigns to help the population in those regions.





→ 10 ABBREVIATIONS

- **ACE**
Action for Climate Empowerment
- **CCAA**
Spain's Autonomous Communities
- **CRC**
Convention on the Rights of the Child
- **UNFCCC**
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- **COP**
Conference of the Parties
- **CENEAM**
Centro Nacional de Educación Ambiental, National Centre for Environmental Education
- **ENPE**
Estrategia Nacional contra la Pobreza Energética, National Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty
- **EAS**
Educación Ambiental para la Sostenibilidad, Environmental Education for Sustainability
- **ESenRED**
Escuelas hacia la Sostenibilidad en Red, School Sustainability Network
- **ESD**
Education for Sustainable Development
- **GHG**
Greenhouse gases
- **INE**
Instituto Nacional de Estadística, National Statistics Institute
- **LOPIVI**
Ley de protección integral a la Infancia y la Adolescencia frente a la Violencia, Law on the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents from Violence.
- **MEFP**
Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
- **MITECO**
Ministerio de Transición Ecológica y Reto Demográfico, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge
- **MSAN**
Ministerio de Sanidad, Ministry of Health
- **NDC**
Nationally Determined Contributions
- **NAPs**
National Adaptation Plans
- **SDGs**
Sustainable Development Goals
- **WHO**
World Health Organization
- **PMUS**
Planes de Movilidad Urbana Sostenible, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans
- **PNIEC**
Plan Nacional Integrado de Energía y Clima, National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan
- **PNACC**
Plan Nacional de Adaptación al Cambio Climático, National Climate Change Adaptation Plan
- **PAEAS**
Plan de Acción de Educación Ambiental para la Sostenibilidad, Environmental Education for Sustainability Action Plan
- **EU**
European Union





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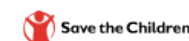
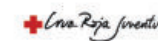
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WE ARE A NETWORK OF 75 CHILDREN'S ORGANISATIONS





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We are a network of children's organisations whose mission is to protect, promote and defend the rights of children and adolescents in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our vision is to completely fulfil all the rights of children and adolescents, combining the efforts of children's organisations and all social actors.

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