



# Making Climate and Environment Policies *for & with* Children and Young People

Working alongside today's youngest generation on climate solutions benefits them, their families and the wider society. The time to engage, listen and act is now.

## Executive summary

The climate crisis is a child rights crisis. It is a direct threat to a child's ability to survive, grow and thrive. Children and young people are the least responsible for climate change yet will bear the greatest burden of its impacts. Therefore, it is critical that national climate policies that set forth the priorities for climate response in countries are child sensitive.

This means that national climate policies engage children and young people during development and prioritize building the climate resilience of services that they depend upon most. Prioritizing the climate resilience of social sectors such as water, health and education is imperative as this is often the best way to reduce climate risk, particularly in countries that are the most vulnerable to climate change but have low per-capita emissions.

National climate and environmental policies and plans inclusive of children and young people are extremely limited; and the social sectors that concern them most are often overlooked in decision-making. UNICEF has found that only 34% of 103 countries with new or revised climate plans,<sup>1</sup> otherwise known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs),<sup>2</sup> are child sensitive.

This is an interim discussion paper that will be updated after all remaining NDCs are submitted. It demonstrates a gap in child sensitivity of climate policies, explains the importance of including the needs and priorities of children and young people in policies and plans to benefit the whole of society, identifies best practices, and provides guidance for policymakers on how to meaningfully partner with children and young people as climate and environmental champions for a sustainable response.

# Children and young people championing change in a changing climate

→ Through community and civic engagement, children and young people are championing climate and environment solutions for a world in crisis. Many, especially in low-income countries, are directly and disproportionately affected by more frequent and intense climate-related stresses and extreme weather events,<sup>3</sup> including from heatwaves, floods, wildfires and cyclones.

The climate crisis threatens children's survival and ability to grow and thrive, despite them being the least responsible for contributing to it.<sup>4</sup> Key to addressing these threats is building the climate resilience of and access to safe water and sanitation, universal healthcare and quality education, as evidence shows that these significantly reduce children's vulnerability to climate impacts. The progress made for children and young people over the last few decades and their future prosperity are at risk — for them and the wider society.

Young activists are demanding that policymakers and planners consider their unique realities, rights and needs in decisions, and involve them in decisions that will define their future. Many point out that current action falls far short of the level of ambition required to protect children and their families and communities; let alone future generations.

Their views are backed by evidence — including from the most recent NDC submissions. A UNICEF analysis of 103 new and updated NDCs<sup>9</sup> shows only 35 to be child sensitive (see right). While this number reflects a growing attention to children and young people compared to the previous round of NDCs, the UNICEF analysis suggests that current provisions for addressing their needs and priorities will be insufficient to stop or even slow the severe impacts that climate change will have on them, particularly if global emissions targets are not met. In other words, there is an urgent need to dramatically increase global commitment to child-sensitive policies and plans.<sup>10</sup>

The NDCs are only one of the many climate- and environment-focused policies and plans that are needed to reduce short and long-term impacts on children and young people, including at all levels of government and across sectors. For instance, children and young people will benefit from the integration of a child-sensitive approach in both national and sub-national climate and environment policies and plans; including National Adaptation Plans (NAPs); disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies; climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) guidelines; air pollution protocols; climate finance proposals; and country-specific strategies on children, adolescents, youth, gender, disability, education, health, nutrition and sustainable energy.

## What are NDCs?

**Nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** are the commitments made by the countries that signed the Paris Agreement. Each country sets the actions that it will take to meet the Paris Agreement goals, with a particular focus on reducing carbon emissions. NDCs are reviewed and updated every five years.

**~ 1 billion**

Children living in countries that are at an 'extremely high-risk' from the impacts of climate change (nearly half of the world's children).<sup>5</sup>

**1 in 4**

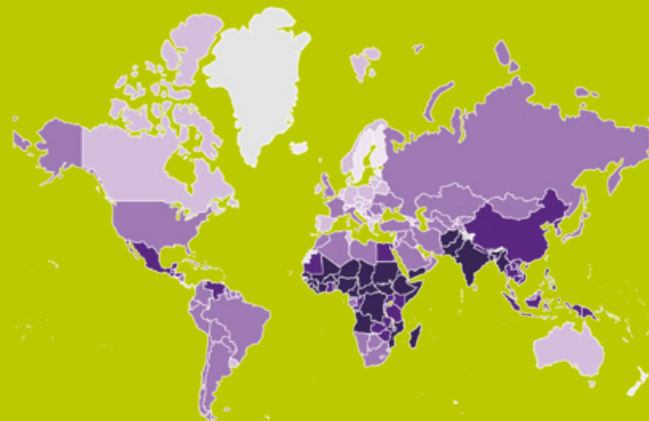
Children & adolescents under age 18 (600 million) that UNICEF projects will be living in areas of extremely high water stress by 2040, which increases disease from poor sanitation & hygiene.<sup>6</sup>

**\$8 trillion/USD**

Cumulative damage from climate change by 2050, impoverishing the world by 3% of GDP (Impact highest in Asian economies: projection of 5.5% GDP if Paris Agreement targets are met; 26.5% if no mitigating actions are taken).<sup>7</sup>

## Understanding Children's Climate Risk

UNICEF's new Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI)<sup>8</sup> provides a comprehensive view of children's exposure and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. The CCRI ranks countries based on children's exposure to climate and environmental shocks. It also maps their vulnerability to those shocks — based on their access to essential services and systems — to help prioritize action for those most at risk.



**34%** 35 of the 103 new and revised NDCs analyzed in the study were found to be child sensitive

The study included 103 country NDCs; based on the criteria of the country being one of the 157 with UNICEF programmes and with NDCs submitted by Oct. 21, 2021 (see methodology in the Appendix).

**“We need capacity building of young people to let them know how international policies are made and how their voices can be meaningfully a part of it.”**

Heeta Lakahani, India



## Child-sensitive climate and environmental policies

→ Child-sensitive climate and environmental policies and plans, including NDCs, are required to urgently address the crisis children and young people are facing.

Action must move beyond proclamations for engagement. It must span across sectors in all levels of government and include multiple stakeholders: from UN agencies to civil society; from academia to the public and private sectors. Most important, action both for and with children and young people must be meaningful, strategic and funded. The Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>11</sup> gives children and young people the fundamental right to be heard in decisions that impact them, with climate as a top concern.<sup>12</sup> Now is the time to listen, and act.

Child-sensitive climate and environmental policies, including the NDCs, acknowledge children’s vulnerabilities to climate change and environmental degradation as well as the important role children and young people play in influencing and accelerating climate action. Child-sensitive policies:

- ▶ Explicitly **reference** children and young people;
- ▶ Are **rights-based**. They consider children and young people as rights holders;
- ▶ Are **holistic and multisectoral**. They address the specific risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people. This includes child-sensitive commitments in multiple sectors, such as education, health, water, sanitation, food security and nutrition, energy, social protection, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and information systems; and
- ▶ Are **inclusive**. They identify children and young people as an important stakeholder and ensure inclusiveness.

From their inception as the accountability mechanism to Paris Agreement goals, NDCs are developed by nation state governments to ensure both a high-level commitment and widespread implementation from local to national levels. Governments contextualize their contributions, priorities and needs based on

local climate risks, impacts, shocks and stressors; country-specific livelihoods and economies; critical public infrastructure; laws and ministry strategies; and other relevant factors.

As such, NDCs are uniquely positioned to both benefit from input and ideas by children and young people in their countries, as well as able to target their unique needs in implementation. Importantly, in addition to child sensitivity, there are many other ways NDCs can benefit children and young people. This includes, critically, the impact of the scale of their ambition both in adaptation and mitigation on children and young people.

### Resilient social services can reduce climate risk for millions of children

- ▶ Investments that improve access to resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **415 million children**.
- ▶ Investments that improve educational outcomes can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **275 million children**.
- ▶ Investments that improve access to health and nutrition services can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **460 million children**.
- ▶ Investments that improve access to social protection and reducing poverty can considerably reduce overall climate risk for **310 million children**.

Source: [The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis](#) report, pages 15-16.

# A UNICEF study: 2020-2021 child-sensitive NDCs

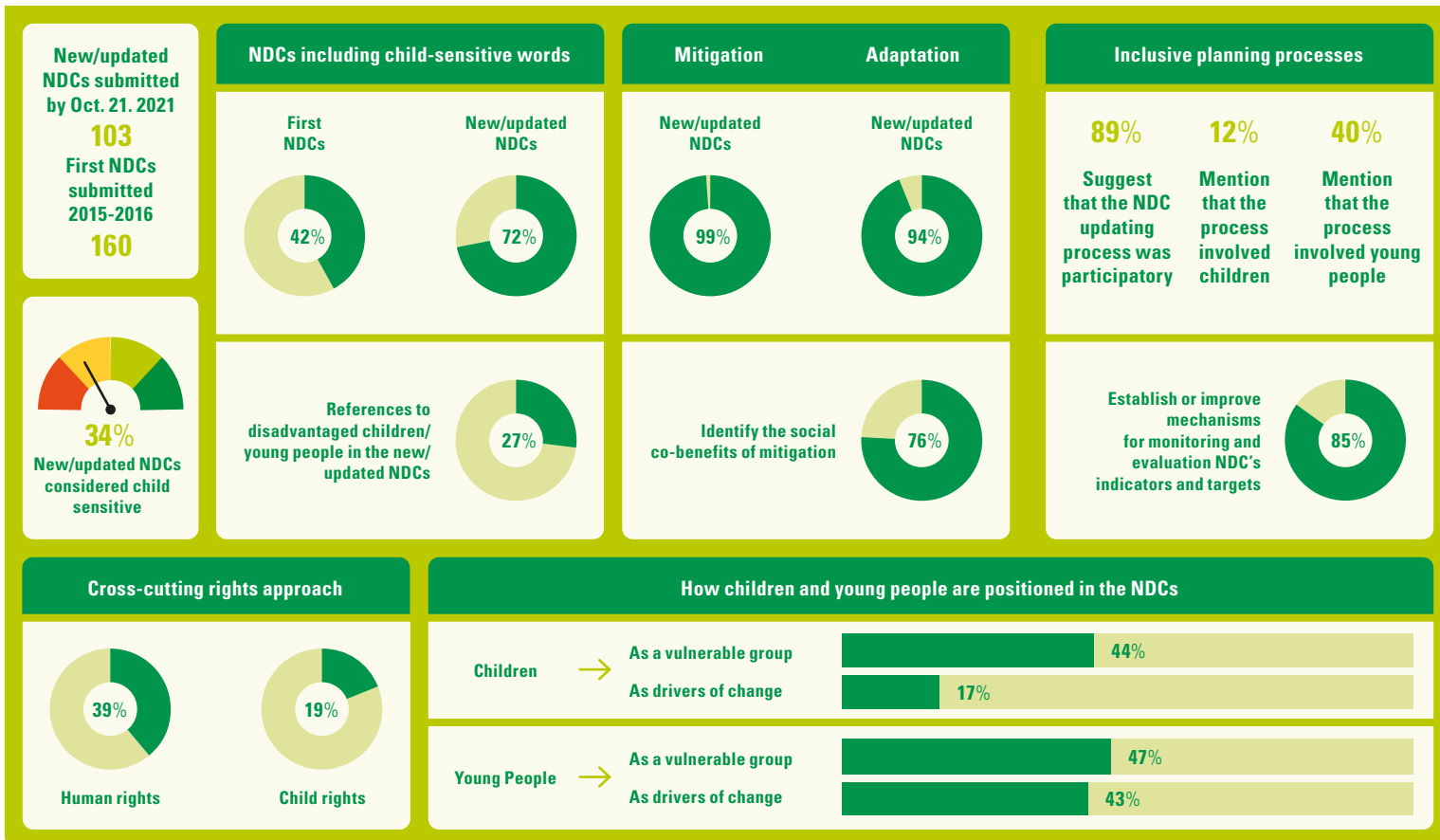
To identify child-sensitive NDCs and guide others towards this goal, UNICEF conducted a study to assess the child sensitivity of new and updated NDCs.<sup>13</sup> Its methodology built on the findings of a 2019 UNICEF study entitled *Are Climate Policies Child Sensitive?*<sup>14</sup> The 2019 study conducted a systematic search of key words to capture any direct or relevant reference to children and young people in the NDC, and assessed the nature of the reference to evaluate whether it was 'substantive' or 'passive.' It included 160 NDCs submitted in 2015-2016.

The 2021 study presented here expanded on this research by developing 47 indicators for analysis under the categories of **references, rights-based, holistic and multisectoral and inclusive**. The methodology and indicators in the Appendix explain how the analysis identified 35 country NDCs as meeting the study criteria for being child sensitive. The 2021 study analyzed 103 new or updated 2020-2021 NDCs based on the criteria of the country being one of the 157 with UNICEF programmes, a country that has signed the Paris Agreement, and with NDCs submitted by Oct. 21, 2021.

Because countries continue to submit NDCs, this is an interim discussion paper that will be updated after all remaining NDCs are submitted. The following dashboard snapshot provides a disaggregated view of key data points from UNICEF's analysis of 103 new and revised 2020-2021 NDCs, with additional findings later in the document. The dashboard also includes comparisons to the 160 First NDCs reviewed in UNICEF's 2019 study.



## Snapshot: Child-sensitive climate policies - Analysis of new and updated NDCs



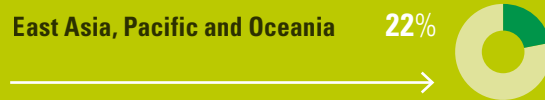




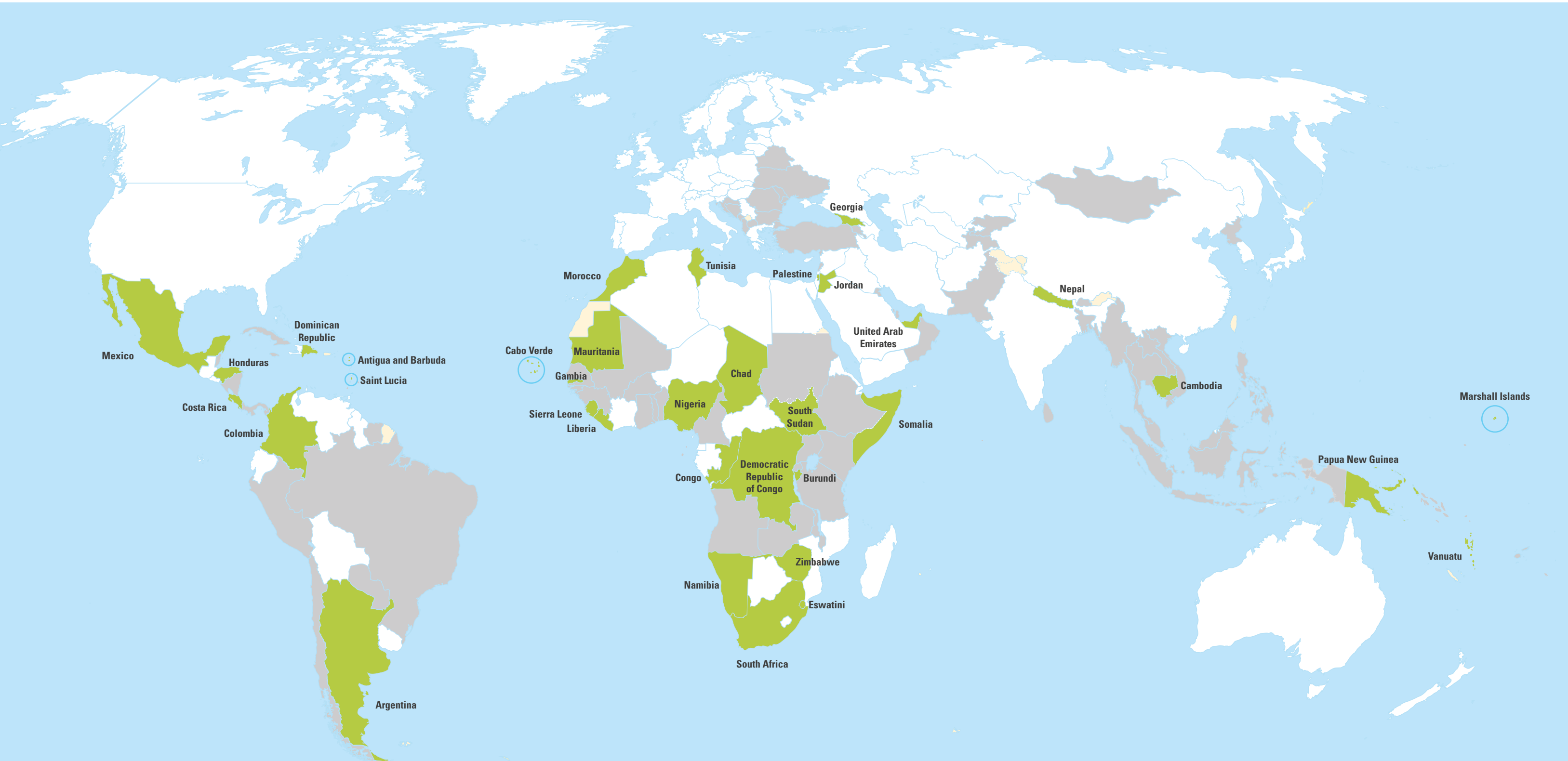
The study findings elaborated on later in the paper include an assessment of inclusive planning processes, sectoral commitments and levels of Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE).<sup>15</sup> ACE is an overarching goal set forth by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and in the Paris Agreement to empower all members of society to engage in climate action, through education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and international cooperation on these issues.

Sectoral commitments are valuable to include as improving the resilience of services — like health, education and water — is critical to ensure that children and young people have the greatest opportunity to survive, grow and thrive in the face of climate and environmental threats. This is particularly true in countries where children and young people are the most vulnerable to a changing climate. Additionally, improvements in the resilience of water, health and education have the potential to decrease climate risk for more than 400 million children, as detailed in UNICEF's *The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis* report.<sup>16</sup>

### UNICEF Regions: Percentage of NDCs in the study considered child sensitive



## Countries identified in the study as having child-sensitive NDCs



The map distinguishes countries with NDCs found to be child sensitive in green, countries with NDCs found not to be child sensitive in gray and countries not in the study in white. The study included countries that met its criteria of the country being one of the 157 with UNICEF programmes, that has signed the Paris Agreement, and with NDCs submitted by Oct. 21, 2021.

The 103 country NDCs included in the study are from Albania, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of North Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Ethiopia, European Union (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania), Fiji, Gambia,

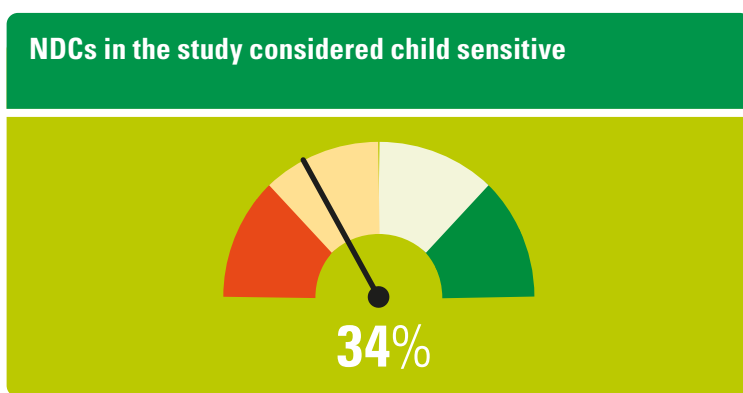
Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome

and Principe, Saint Lucia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

# Key findings from the study of new and updated NDCs

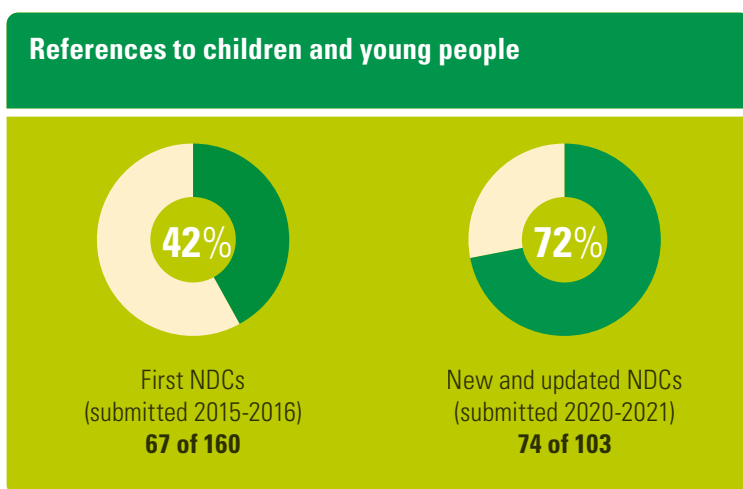
**1** The number of child-sensitive NDCs is low — with about a third of the new and updated NDCs showing child-sensitive climate commitments, indicators and targets.

- ▶ 34% of the 103 submitted new and updated NDCs are considered child sensitive.
- ▶ Fewer than 19% of the NDCs consider children and young people as rights-holders. This means only 1 in 5 include references to child rights or intergenerational justice and equity in a meaningful way, for example, as part of its vision, a cross-cutting approach, element or pillar on which the NDC is built.
- ▶ More than 43% of the NDCs identify young people as drivers of change in climate action. This highlights an opportunity for policymakers to acknowledge the role that young people can play as agents of change and include young people in the NDC implementation processes.<sup>17</sup>



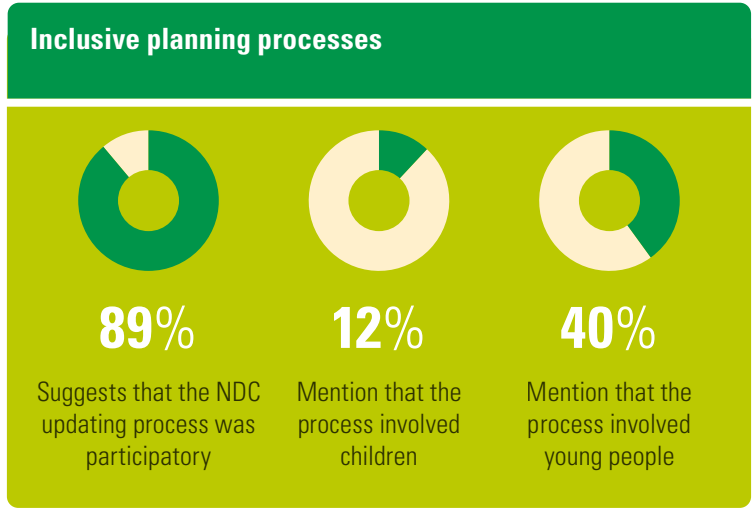
**2** There is an improvement in meaningful references to children and young people in the new and updated NDCs compared to an analysis of the first NDC submissions.<sup>18</sup>

- ▶ UNICEF’s 2019 analysis of 160 NDCs found that only 42% of NDCs referenced children and young people in their NDCs. In the 2021 analysis of 103 new and updated NDCs, UNICEF found that 72% reference children and young people.
- ▶ Close to 27% of the new and updated NDCs analyzed in the study also reference marginalized and disadvantaged children and young people. This includes, but is not limited to, children and young people with disabilities; of traditional, Indigenous and ethnic groups; of linguistic, racial or religious minorities; from households or neighborhoods experiencing poverty; and whose families have climate-sensitive livelihoods.
- ▶ Only 18% of the new and updated NDCs have a specific section addressing children or young people — either included as part of the vulnerability assessment or diagnosis, or as a section of specific commitments.



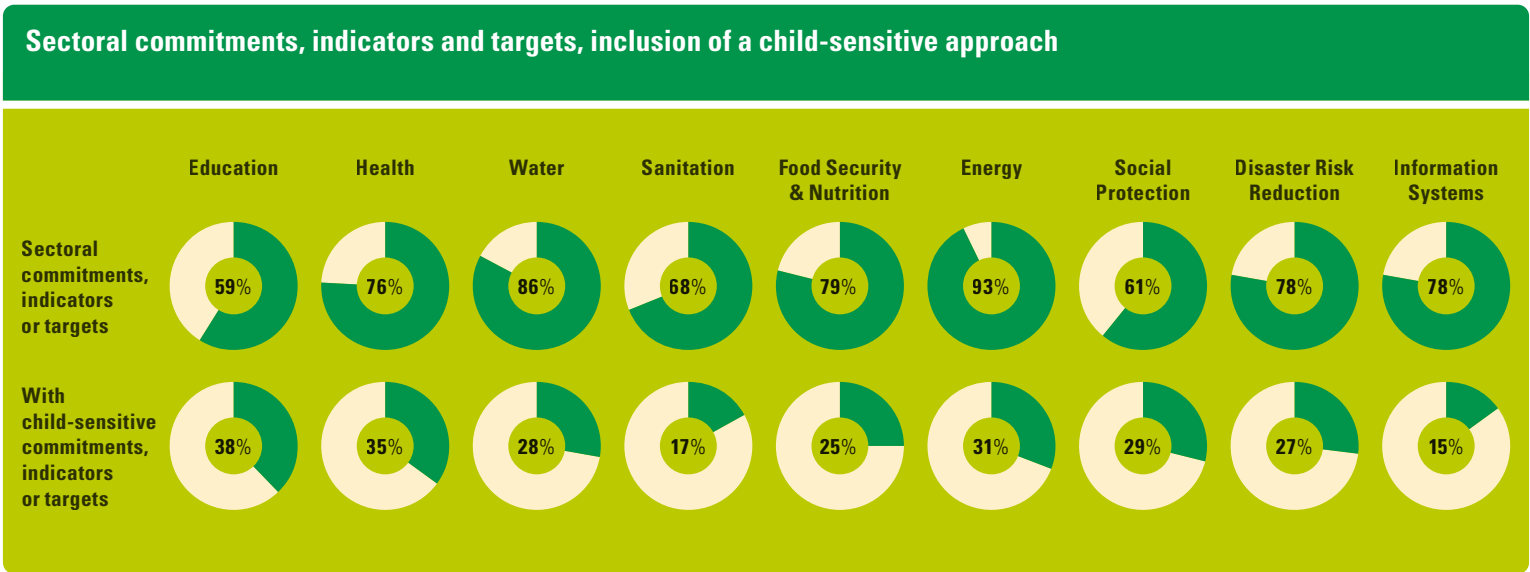
**3** There is considerable stakeholder engagement and participatory processes captured in the development of the new and updated NDCs. However, more can be done to include children and young people in NDC processes.

- ▶ 89% of the NDCs suggest that they used participatory processes in developing the plan. This includes if there was participation of other stakeholders than the public sector, such as civil society, the academic community, private sectors and organizations for children and young people.
- ▶ Only 12% and 40% of the NDCs mention the inclusion of children and young people respectively in the NDC development process.
- ▶ Nearly three quarters of the NDCs at 69% commit to participatory climate processes, which is imperative for equitably advancing child rights in policy planning. However, only 36% of public participation commitments can be considered child sensitive. This means that only a handful of countries in their NDCs specifically address or consider the participation of children and young people in decision-making spaces on the climate agenda.



**4** While a majority of the NDCs contain sectoral commitments, indicators or targets (in education, health, water, sanitation, food security and nutrition, energy, social protection, DRR and information systems), the commitments vary significantly per sector; and very few commitments are child sensitive.

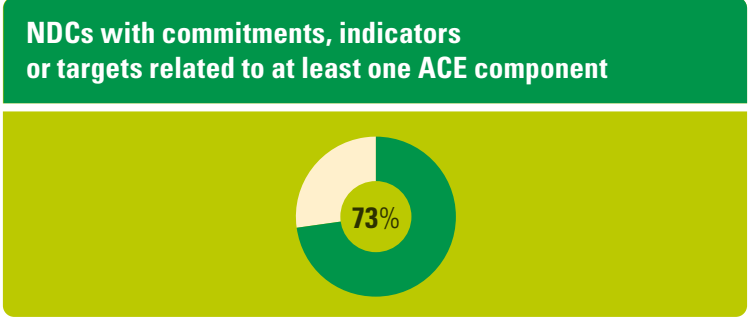
- ▶ While 86% of the NDCs have water commitments, indicators or targets, only 28% include a child-sensitive approach to water by addressing water resources in a manner which can be considered to constitute a human rights-based approach.
- ▶ While 59% of NDCs include commitments in the education sector (which is quite low compared to other sectors such as energy and water), only 38% do so at the school level.
- ▶ Commitments on equitable access to services and systems are rarely included (i.e., water as a right to safe drinking water;<sup>19</sup> sustainable energy as a right to access education or healthcare<sup>20</sup>). This highlights an area for improvement to ensure the resilience of children and young people.
- ▶ The low instance of child-sensitive commitments to DRR at 27% is also of concern considering the disproportionate negative impact from disasters on children and young people, and the necessity of prioritizing their needs and potential for engagement for lowering disaster risk.<sup>21</sup>



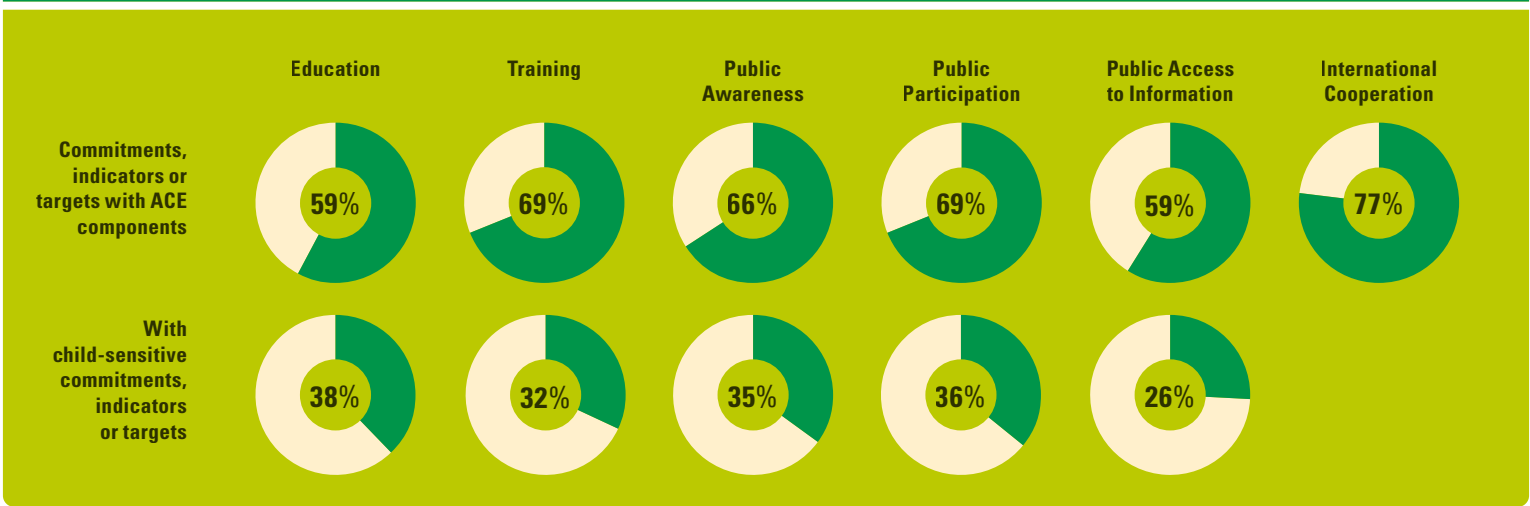


**5** A significant majority of countries are making commitments to specific pillars of the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) agenda. This includes in the areas of climate education, training for climate action, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and international cooperation.

- ▶ 73% of the NDCs contain at least one commitment to one of the six Action for Climate Empowerment pillars.
- ▶ Only 26% of the NDCs commit to child-sensitive public access to information. What this means is that a mere 27 countries in their NDCs are specifically addressing or considering the capacities and needs of children and young people to access climate information and ensuring it is child-friendly (i.e., the climate information is age-appropriate and suitable for the capacities of children and young people of all age groups and backgrounds).<sup>22</sup>



**Action for Climate Empowerment - ACE**



# Spotlight on child sensitivity in 2020-2021 NDCs

→ The following highlight good policies and actions in NDCs from countries where UNICEF is providing support to governments in advancing child-sensitive climate and environmental policies, plans and programmes.

## Cabo Verde NDC<sup>23</sup>

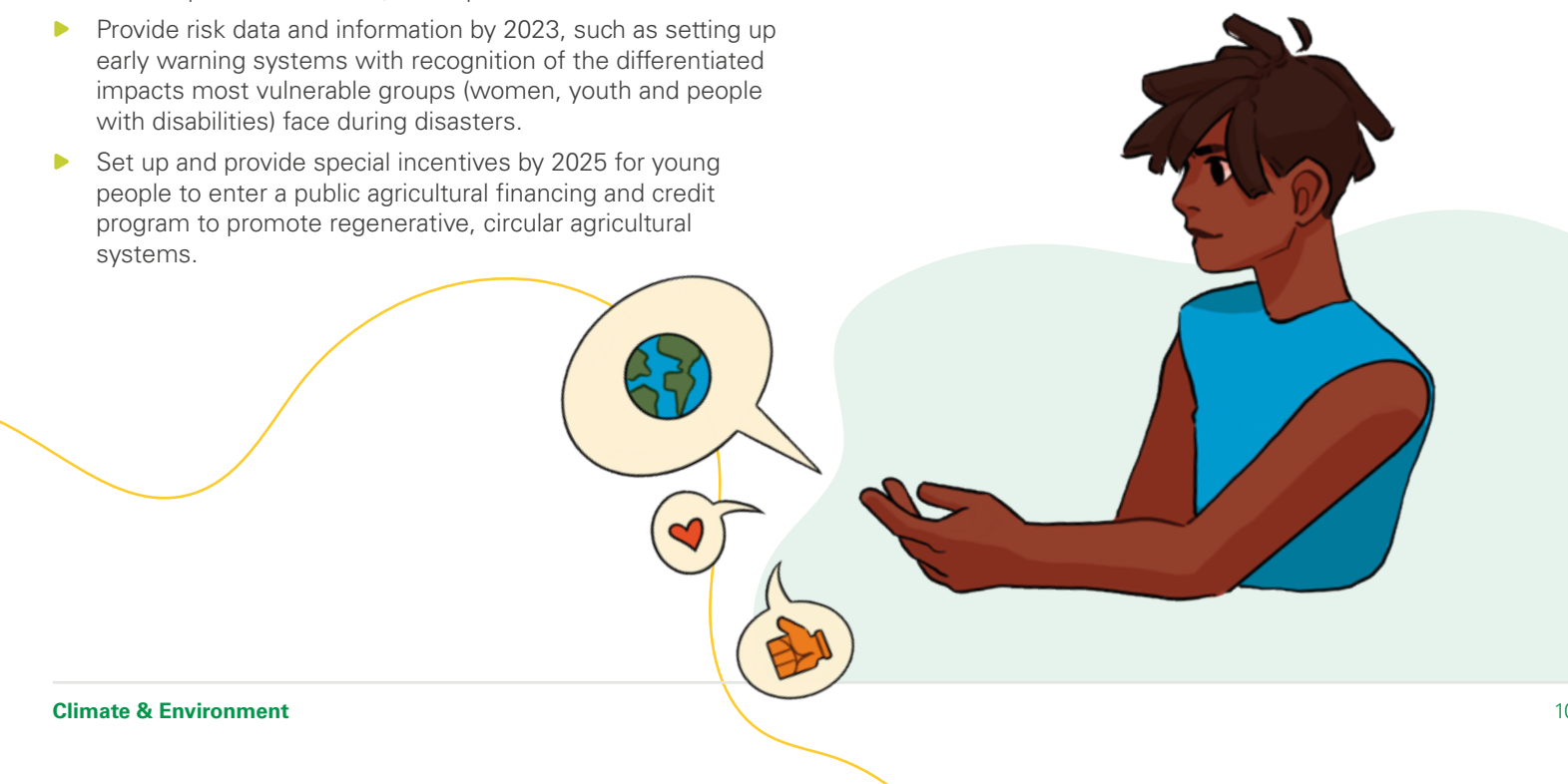
The 2021 Cabo Verde NDC recognizes children and young people as a vulnerable group that must be prioritized in climate action, including through data-driven research and specific strategies. For instance, it plans to systematically collect gender-differentiated and disaggregated data to identify gaps, needs, achievements and opportunities for children and young people — especially in rural communities — and report on updates every other year onwards.

The NDC also commits to Action for Climate Empowerment for children and young people. In doing so, it recognizes them as valuable stakeholders and agents of change in identifying and responding to climate change hazards; in safeguarding natural resources; and in sharing their knowledge of economic, social and environmental resilience. The NDC includes a dedicated section on young people, and highlights strategies throughout, such as to:

- ▶ Increase resilience through young people’s participation and engagement in climate-related issues, climate policy and implementation.
- ▶ Create a network of youth associations (per island/ municipality or city) as a focal point for young people’s participation in climate action by 2022.
- ▶ Enhance young people’s skills in information technology (IT) and languages.
- ▶ Promote employment opportunities for young people in the fields of renewable energy, sustainable tourism, forestry, conservation and entrepreneurship (such as in the sustainably- and locally sourced products business, bike repair and other businesses).
- ▶ Provide risk data and information by 2023, such as setting up early warning systems with recognition of the differentiated impacts most vulnerable groups (women, youth and people with disabilities) face during disasters.
- ▶ Set up and provide special incentives by 2025 for young people to enter a public agricultural financing and credit program to promote regenerative, circular agricultural systems.

Are the commitments on Action for Climate Empowerment components child sensitive?	
 Training	✓
 Public awareness	✓
 Public access to information	✓
 Public participation	✓
 International cooperation	✓

*2021 Cabo Verde NDC data analysis.*



## Cambodia NDC<sup>24</sup>

The 2020 NDC recognizes the disproportionate impact climate change has on children and young people and how the country can increase sectoral climate-smart planning in health (from vector-borne and water-borne diseases),<sup>25</sup> nutrition (from links between deforestation and child micronutrient deficiencies), child protection (as a factor in gender-based violence), WASH (including climate WASH assessments for communities and health facilities), education (climate change inclusion in curricula and the Education Management Information System) and disaster risk reduction (DRR plans for public health facilities).

It also highlights the critical role that young people can play in the development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of climate actions and emergency response plans across sectors, and in participating meaningfully in the development of climate policies. The NDC places a focus on young people through adaptation and mitigation measures in the energy, industry, infrastructure, human health, conservation, tourism and transport sectors. This includes increasing their knowledge on environmental rights and equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge and training for a green transition.

The Cambodia NDC places young people front and centre with a section on *youth engagement*, and multiple performance goals, indicators and actions throughout. For instance, 55 of 86 (64%) of its detailed adaptation actions include how to support and engage young people, including to:

- ▶ Provide training on climate-smart and sustainable livelihoods for young people experiencing poverty in rural areas.
- ▶ Build centers of excellence for delivering climate change courses and research among universities, with young people engaged in all aspects: research, curricula development, teaching, etc.
- ▶ Incorporate climate change in teacher training as a required component.
- ▶ Include young people in awareness-raising campaigns on national end-to-end early warning systems to ensure effective dissemination to populations at risk.
- ▶ Include separate spaces (rooms with doors and lavatory facilities) in 100% of rural shelters for dignity and to protect women and children from violence.
- ▶ Build the capacities of at least 80% of young people in rubber production on climate vulnerability impact assessments, and adaptation and mitigation actions for the industry.
- ▶ Strengthen technology transfer, knowledge and skills on early warning systems and disease management for 5% of young people involved in animal production.

### Are the sectoral commitments, indicators and targets child sensitive?

 Education	✓	 Sanitation	✓
 Health	✓	 Food security & nutrition	✓
 Energy	✓	 Disaster risk reduction	✓
 Water	✓	 Information systems & data	✓

2020 Cambodia NDC data analysis.

## Namibia NDC<sup>26</sup>

The 2021 NDC focuses attention on young people in recognition that “they will inherit the worst impacts of the climate crisis and bear future costs of decisions made today.” It also recognizes their agency for accelerating the country’s climate ambitions. In support, the NDC commits to improving employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. Many of the actions focus on ministry-supported participation by young people in adaptation and mitigation measures in agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU), and tourism through climate-focused projects and awareness-raising campaigns.

The NDC commits to just transition implementation strategies for and with young people such as developing and incorporating a youth climate strategy to inform NDC updates, establishing a climate and risk management working group, and creating a just transition strategy and green job assessment model for Namibia. The efforts include creating a baseline, monitoring and assessing progress, and evaluating and reporting results for improvement. In outlining prioritized adaptation measures, the Namibia NDC includes young people as a key stakeholder with specific actions detailed for their engagement. This includes improving:

- ▶ Young people’s engagement and participation in rural and urban areas in climate-smart agriculture; water resources management processes; and sustainable forestry initiatives, adaptation and policy.
- ▶ Young people’s awareness-raising engagement and involvement in climate-related tourism, including attention on helping to secure the future of World Heritage sites facing high disaster risk related to climate change.
- ▶ Young people’s engagement in raising awareness, identifying needs and future threats, and offering solutions for health issues connected to a changing climate. This includes addressing physical and psychological vulnerabilities and building young people’s resilience to climate shocks and stresses.
- ▶ Young people’s innovation in preparedness and response in emergency and disaster situations resulting from the impacts of climate change.



### NDC update process



- ✓ Conducted a participatory process
- ✓ Participatory process involved young people

### References to children/young people



- ✓ In the new/updated NDC
- ✓ References to most disadvantaged

### Rights approach



- ✓ Consideration of human rights

*2021 Namibia NDC data analysis.*





## The Gambia NDC<sup>27</sup>

The 2021 Gambia NDC has a strong focus on mainstreaming climate change into all education curricula and includes actions towards this goal. Policywise, education is one of the strategic priorities of its National Development Plan 2018-2022<sup>28</sup> and its 2016 National Climate Change Policy (NCCP).<sup>29</sup> The NCCP states: “climate change education is critical to foster understanding of the complexities and interconnections of the various challenges posed by climate change, and can significantly contribute to disaster risk reduction efforts in the sense that it prepares trainees to face natural hazards.”

The Gambia NDC responds to these policies with a Government commitment to not only continuing to include climate education at basic/primary education levels, but to further expand climate

education in secondary, higher and tertiary education. Since the submission of its first NDC in 2016, the Gambian government also developed a Basic Education curriculum that integrates environmental issues — including climate change. It is now conducting trainings of trainers and teacher training on the curriculum.

The Government also recognizes gaps to be addressed. For instance, the Third National Communication of the Gambia under the UNFCCC<sup>30</sup> reports that while teaching of environmental and social studies at pre-tertiary level incorporates elements of climate change, a recent curriculum audit identified areas for improvement in climate content, how it is presented and in the curriculum.

### Are the sectoral commitments, indicators and targets child sensitive?

 Education	✓	 Food security & nutrition	✓
 Health	✓	 Social protection	✓
 Energy	✓	 Disaster risk reduction	✓
 Sanitation	✓	<i>2021 Gambia NDC data analysis.</i>	

## Actively engaging young people in the NDC and broader climate & environment processes

→ The climate crisis is a child rights crisis that is undermining recent advancement towards global development goals. Implementing solutions to reverse and adapt to climate impacts requires all of society to be more engaged and resilient, including the world’s youngest citizens.<sup>31</sup>

Participation can take multiple forms based on a young person’s age, required scale of involvement, means available (such as in-person or online), and ability for an organization to meaningfully participate in consultations, collaborative partnerships, or in activities led by young people. Reframing young people as partners, ensuring their equitable access to climate knowledge,

and providing opportunities for meaningful participation will help harness their unique body of knowledge, experiences and views for more effective and relevant child-sensitive policies.

## Features of Meaningful Participation

### 1 Space

Safe and inclusive opportunity to form and express views

### 2 Voice

Expression of views must be facilitated freely in a medium of choice

### 3 Influence

Views must be acted on as appropriate

### 4 Audience

Views must be listened to



### Consultative Participation: Saint Lucia NDC<sup>32</sup>

Saint Lucia is actively involving children and young people in climate decision-making. In 2020, UNICEF facilitated a consultation with young people and the Department of Sustainable Development of Saint Lucia. The young people presented their views on the revision of the 2016 NDC. They advocated for the country to sign the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action, launched by several governments and young people at COP25 (see right).<sup>33</sup> Before and since signing the declaration, the Saint Lucia Government has been active in making its climate and environment policies and processes child sensitive.

In the Eastern Caribbean region, UNICEF worked with children and young people and the Saint Lucia Government in their NDC revision process, with the country recognizing UNICEF as a strategic partner in its 2021 NDC. To advance child sensitivity in climate policies, UNICEF and the Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN) consulted thousands of children and young people from 2019 to 2021 throughout the region on their needs, priorities and ideas for action. They ran consultations through youth networks, UNICEF's U-Report<sup>34</sup> and through various other online platforms. The views of children and young people informed key publications, such as the *Caribbean Children Facing Climate Crisis* report and policy brief,<sup>35</sup> the Climate, Environment and Energy Landscape Analysis for Children (CEELAC) for the Eastern Caribbean Area, and the Saint Lucia NDC. Consultations in Saint Lucia also informed a youth-friendly video on the NDCs that will be shown to thousands of students to raise awareness and spur dialogue on climate change in the Eastern Caribbean.



**We call on all Governments to sign:**  
[Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#)

### Collaborative Participation: Costa Rica NDC<sup>36</sup>

In Costa Rica, UNICEF, the Vice Ministry of Youth and young people have developed an alliance for climate action to create spaces for youth participation in the different phases of the NDC process. To support Costa Rica's NDC updating process in 2020, young people from different groups benefitted from training sessions by UNICEF on the NDC basics and how to contribute to the updating process. UNICEF also supported young people in dialogue with NDC decision-makers and in building child- and young people-focused proposals for inclusion in the NDC. UNICEF, the Vice Ministry of Youth and young people are now advocating to institutionalize youth participation in the NDC process, including the next update and in its implementation.

## The Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action

### Members States that have signed commit to:

- Advocating for global recognition and fulfillment of children's inalienable right to a healthy environment;
- Enhancing efforts to respect, promote and consider the rights of children and young people in implementation of the Paris Agreement at all levels, including recognition of their specific vulnerabilities;
- Scaling up and accelerating investment in child- and youth-responsive adaptation, disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures;
- Strengthening the capacity of children and young people on climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts;
- Enhancing the meaningful participation of children and youth in climate change processes;
- Exploring measures to establish an international Commission for Children and Future Generations; and
- Adopting institutional and administrative measures, as well as partnerships, at national and international levels to actively pursue the above objectives, and to enhance coherence and a cross-cutting focus on children and young people in climate action.

## Supporting young people through the NDC Partnership

The NDC Partnership is a global coalition of 100+ members, including developed and developing countries in all regions of the world, and major international institutions and non-state actors. The partnership supports the development of ambitious climate and sustainable development agendas and, as such, recognizes the critical role young people play in successful climate action.

In 2020, UNICEF and other members of the NDC Partnership supported young people to develop a Youth Engagement Plan (YEP)<sup>41</sup> through a Youth Task Force comprised of representatives from Partnership countries and institutional members including UNICEF. UNICEF was also a key partner in the 2021 inaugural NDC Partnership Youth Engagement Forum where participants reflected on lessons learned for meaningful engagement with young people within NDC processes, implementation projects and recommendations (see highlights video).<sup>42</sup> Through the YEP, the NDC Partnership members have committed to a series of actions to engage meaningfully with young people, such as to:

- ▶ Design NDC processes at the country level that are inclusive of young people
- ▶ Support the development of NDC implementation projects led by young people
- ▶ Strengthen climate change capacity building for young people
- ▶ Encourage participation by young people in global NDC Partnership activities

## Training young people in NDC advocacy

In July 2021, UNICEF, UNFCCC and YOUNGO offered an advocacy training to nearly 200 young international climate activists selected to attend the Government of Italy Youth4Climate pre-COP26 event: “Driving Ambition” (see #Youth4Climate live<sup>37</sup>). UNFCCC is the UN mandated agency for climate change, while YOUNGO is its constituency for young people.<sup>38</sup> The online trainings — with breakout sessions in English, Arabic, French, and Spanish — aimed to support the delegates at the pre-COP-26 event to put forward ideas and concrete proposals to tackle the climate crisis.

Building on lessons from UNICEF’s Youth Advocacy Guide (YAG),<sup>39</sup> the event focused on delegates building their own climate advocacy plans. The training built on the YAG process that takes users on a journey from fact-finding to stakeholder engagement; from reading and contributing to policy documents to how to plan and implement advocacy and awareness-raising activities. After the training, many of the participants continued relationship-building, planning, resource acquisition, trainings and networking on UNDP’s platform SparkBlue.<sup>40</sup>



# How can climate and environment policies, plans and programmes address priority issues for and with children and young people?

→ The study shows that while substantive progress is being made in addressing rights of children and young people threatened by environmental degradation and climate change, multiple opportunities remain for advancing child-sensitive policies. The following guidance provides ideas for action.

## Empower children and young people in climate processes

- ▶ Support platforms for participation, network-building, and civic engagement that raise children's and young people's awareness, foster relationships and secure their right to participate in decisions that affect them — as appropriate for their age, culture and context.
- ▶ Promote institutionalized participation mechanisms that guarantee a safe space for children and young people in global climate negotiations.
- ▶ Strengthen children's and young people's knowledge, advocacy and innovation on both adaptation and mitigation to improve climate resilience, including for children and young people of different ages, genders, ethnicities and socioeconomic status; with disabilities; on the move; and experiencing marginalization.
- ▶ Raise ambitions and climate actions for participation and leadership by children and young people at national, community and local levels in all policy stages: advocacy, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- ▶ Guarantee public, transparent access to information on the processes and results of government climate action for children and young people — including in age-appropriate language and as an accountability and empowerment mechanism.
- ▶ Promote and support volunteering and engagement with civil society organizations advocating for climate justice with skills and capacity-building, tools and financial resources.
- ▶ Offer climate change peer education, experiential learning, risk and resource mapping, participatory research and mentorship opportunities towards a low-carbon future.

## Build government and whole-of-society capacities for inclusive climate action

- ▶ Support government social sectors to review and update sector-relevant goals and targets of climate-related policies and their implications for their sector planning. Ensure targets are aligned with national circumstances and ambitious enough to achieve Paris Agreement goals.
- ▶ Take a whole-of-society approach in supporting civil society, children, young people and the private sector to provide constructive input to climate policy processes by facilitating and ensuring adequate enabling environment.
- ▶ Promote positive social norms and attitudes that value the uniqueness and diversity of children's and young people's contributions, priorities and perspectives, as their views are not homogeneous (i.e., through intergenerational dialogues to increase mutual understanding; providing resources for including policy-shaping processes).
- ▶ Develop child-sensitive indicators within policies, and for implementation plans.

## Incorporate child-sensitive sectoral interventions in climate policy processes

- ▶ Include health, nutrition, education, social protection WASH and other relevant social sectors and local governments in the NDCs and other climate-policy development processes that are most relevant to the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable children and young people – ensuring their concerns and demands are incorporated.
- ▶ Convene child, young people, community and stakeholder policy reviews with a child-sensitivity lens.
- ▶ Strengthen education partnerships to integrate child-sensitive climate action — including on reducing disaster risk — into policies at schools and learning centres for out-of-school children and young people.





## Strengthen and support the implementation of child-sensitive climate actions

- ▶ Build knowledge on the linkage between climate policy and child rights, child sensitivity and the value of including children and young people of differing ages, genders, disabilities, ethnicities, and migration and socioeconomic status for more effective climate policies.
- ▶ Strengthen social sectors institutional capacity in climate action and cross-sectoral coordination through relevant mechanisms — such as capacity building, technology transfer and finance — to ensure effective implementation of climate actions for the well-being of children and young people.
- ▶ Shift laws, policies, practices and budgets to include children's and young people's rights and participation in climate action.

## Support child-sensitive data generation and modelling

- ▶ Assess the climate landscape for children and young people in countries to identify gaps, needs, capacities, vulnerabilities, opportunities, which can be used to improve policies.
- ▶ Support age-disaggregated, gender-disaggregated and localized data on both exposure and vulnerability of the poorest, most vulnerable and climate-risk prone populations to inform climate policies.
- ▶ Support data-gathering on actions to reduce emissions through energy efficiency and clean energy in schools and learning centres, healthcare facilities, WASH services and social protection policies.
- ▶ Ensure data is accessible, high quality and relevant for stakeholders and partners to inform and shape climate policies for children and young people.

## Time to listen; time to act!

The urgency of the climate crisis and its impact on children and young people cannot be underestimated. Without a low-carbon future, millions will struggle to survive, grow, develop, learn, play, participate and contribute, especially in low- to middle-income countries.

Policymakers, UN agencies, civil society, academics, and public and private sectors all have a role in prioritizing child and youth in climate action, and involving them as agents of change. Young people are demanding bold action to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. The time to listen and act is now!<sup>43</sup>



**“I started a movement with other young people to ask for the Chilean Government’s signing of the Escazu Agreement<sup>44</sup> because we consider it an urgent demand to combat environmental inequality. The active participation of young people in climate action is fundamental.”**

Sebastián Benfeld, Chile

## Resources

- ▶ [What are the NDCs?](#) | UNICEF Voices of Youth
- ▶ [Youth Engagement Plan](#) | NDC Partnership
- ▶ [Are Climate Change Policies Climate Sensitive?](#) | UNICEF
- ▶ [Climate Promise](#) | United Nations Development Programme
- ▶ [Youth Advocacy Guide](#) | UNICEF
- ▶ [ENGAGED AND HEARD! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement](#) | UNICEF (see pg. 43-46)
- ▶ [Toolkit for young climate activists](#) | UNICEF
- ▶ [Principles and Policy Guidance on Children's Rights to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment in the ASEAN Region](#) | UNICEF, UNEP and OHCHR
- ▶ [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#)
- ▶ [Words Into Action: Engaging Children and Youth In Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building](#) | UNDRR, UNICEF & 100+ Contributors
- ▶ [Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#) | Interagency Standing Committee (IASC)

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## UNICEF Contacts & Youth Partner Networks

- ▶ Amy Wickham, UNICEF Programme Specialist, Climate, Environment and Energy, [awickham@unicef.org](mailto:awickham@unicef.org)
- ▶ YOUNGO, The Official Children and Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): <http://youngoclimate.org>
- ▶ NDC Partnership: Youth Engagement, <https://ndcpartnership.org/action-areas/youth>

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## Note

This discussion paper has been prepared to disseminate initial research findings, facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge and to stimulate dialogue and action. It reflects research conducted on the best available information from publicly available sources. Unless otherwise indicated, the document is based on information and data available up to October 21, 2021. While all due care has been taken in compiling this discussion paper, UNICEF accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of information in it. We regret any errors or omissions that may have been unwittingly made.

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## Endnotes

1 The study included 103 countries with UNICEF programming, that signed the Paris Agreement and with NDCs submitted by Oct. 21, 2021. NDC submissions analysed for this brief: Albania, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Democratic Republic of North Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Ethiopia, European Union (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania), Fiji, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives,

Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Saint Lucia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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# Appendix

## Methodology

In the study analysis, a country's NDC was deemed child sensitive if it received a minimum of 3 out of 4 points in the categories below: **references, rights-based, holistic and multisectoral, and inclusive.** A category would get 1 point if it satisfied the indicator criteria within the category. Thus, if 1 or more of the multiple indicators listed under a category was included in the NDC, the category would be given 1 point. The lack of all indicators in a category resulted in 0 points for that category. What this means is 35 of 103 NDCs (34%) met this criteria.

Points from each indicator within the study were used to derive the more detailed analysis of child sensitivity across the included NDCs — in regions, at a sectoral level and for ACE analysis. An example is the 38% of NDCs found to have child-sensitive commitments, indicators or targets in the education sector.

The research was spearheaded by the UNICEF regional offices of Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) and the East Asia and Pacific (EAP). UNICEF Headquarters expanded the research to all other regions and worked with the LAC and EAP offices on the ongoing and final global analysis.

## Categories and indicators in the study

### REFERENCES

#### Explicit references to children and young people.

- ▶ Existence of references to child and young people – new or updated NDC
- ▶ Existence of references to child and young people – former NDC
- ▶ Existence of references to marginalized and disadvantaged children and young people
- ▶ Existence of references to disproportionate climate impacts due to gender
- ▶ Existence of references to private sector engagement for climate action
- ▶ Identification of children as a vulnerable group
- ▶ Identification of young people as a vulnerable group
- ▶ Inclusion of a child-specific section

### RIGHTS-BASED

#### Consideration of children and young people as rights holders.

The analysis also looked for references to child rights, intergenerational justice and equity.

- ▶ Existence of references to human rights (right-based approach)
- ▶ Existence of references to child rights

### HOLISTIC AND MULTISECTORIAL

#### Addresses the specific risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people.

This included child-sensitive multisectoral commitments with respect to education, health, water, sanitation, food and nutritional security, energy, social protection, DRR, information systems and ACE components (education, training, public awareness, public access to information, public participation and international cooperation).

Sectoral commitments are valuable to include as improving the resilience of services is critical to ensure that children and young people have the greatest opportunity to survive, grow and thrive in the face of climate and environmental threats. This is particularly true in countries where children and young people are the most vulnerable to a changing climate.

- ▶ Addressing mitigation commitments
- ▶ Identification of social co-benefits of mitigation commitments
- ▶ Addressing adaptation commitments
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on the health sector
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on health
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on the education sector
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on education
- ▶ Inclusion of ACE commitments
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on training
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on training
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on public awareness
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on public awareness
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on public access to information
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on access to information
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on international cooperation
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on energy
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on energy
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on water
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive water commitments
- ▶ Inclusion of sanitation commitments
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on sanitation
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on social protection
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive social protection commitments
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on food production
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on food and nutritional security
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on DRR
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments on DRR
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments to implement or improve information systems & data
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive commitments to implement or improve information systems & data

### INCLUSIVE

#### Identifies children and young people as an important stakeholder and ensures inclusiveness.

The analysis also examined if children and young people were integrated in the consultation process or commits to enhance children's and young people's participation and empowerment.

- ▶ Identification of children as drivers of change
- ▶ Identification of young people as drivers of change
- ▶ Reference to the NDC development or update process being done in a participatory manner
- ▶ Reference to inclusion of children in the participatory process to elaborate or update the NDC
- ▶ Reference to inclusion of young people in the participatory process to elaborate or update the NDC
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments on public participation
- ▶ Inclusion of child-sensitive public participation commitments (Inclusion of child and young people participation)
- ▶ Inclusion of commitments to monitor and evaluate the progress of the NDCs