

Policy Brief: Making Indicators Inclusive of the Needs of Children under the UAE-Belem Work Programme

Recognizing children's heightened vulnerability to climate change, this policy brief urges the inclusion of child-sensitive and child-specific indicators for measuring progress achieved towards the targets referred to in paragraphs 9–10 of decision 2/CMA.5. It outlines five core principles – child rights-based, disaggregated, age-appropriate, holistic, and participatory – to guide the development of these indicators, crucial for ensuring that climate policies and actions effectively safeguard children.

1. Policy Context

COP29 Recognition of Children's Vulnerabilities

Decision 3/CMA.6 acknowledged the critical need for child-sensitive approaches within the indicators being developed under the UAE-Belem work programme. Specifically, paragraph 21 explicitly calls for the inclusion of indicators that capture the unique vulnerabilities of specific populations, by expressing that:

(d) "Indicators that capture information pertaining to, inter alia, **social inclusion**, *Indigenous Peoples*, *participatory processes*, *human rights*, *gender equality*, *migrants*, **children and young people**, and *persons with disabilities*".

(f) "Indicators that reflect the **unique vulnerabilities of children to climate change impacts across the [7] thematic targets** and, potentially, **cross-cutting indicators related to education and the health of children and young people**".

This decision marks a significant step towards ensuring that the monitoring framework for the targets under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, to be developed within the UAE-Belem work programme, addresses the heightened needs of children. Without dedicated child-focused indicators, the specific challenges related to child development and well-being risk being overlooked in broader policy discussions and climate action. This explicitly builds on the outcomes of the expert dialogue on children and climate change to discuss the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and relevant policy solutions in this regard which was mandated under the Global Stocktake ([Decision 1/CMA.5](#)) and took place at of SB60. Specific and actionable recommendations included the development of child-sensitive metrics under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience. As such, incorporating children's rights into thematic indicators for climate change adaptation is imperative.

2. Principles for child-sensitive and child-specific indicators

The Imperative for Child-Focused Climate Action

Mounting evidence underscores the disproportionate negative effects of climate change on children's development and wellbeing. [Nearly half of the world's 2.2 billion children are at extremely high risk](#). These children face a deadly combination of exposure to multiple climate and environmental hazards with a high vulnerability due to inadequate essential services, such as water and sanitation, health care and education. Globally, [at least 242 million students – one in seven students – have experienced school disruptions due to climate events in 2024](#). In addition, [evidence syntheses](#) have found that climate change is affecting almost every aspect of children's health and wellbeing, with a disproportionate impact on children because of their unique vulnerabilities. This evidence has yet to be translated into national policies and strategies that holistically protect and support children on the ground. It furthermore has implications for climate and development finance as well as for how adaptation and resilience-building interventions for vulnerable populations are designed, implemented and monitored. The absence of specific consideration for children risks undermining the effectiveness and equity of climate action on the ground.

The development of child-sensitive and child-specific indicators requires a principled and thoughtful approach grounded in child rights, age appropriate and safeguarding considerations, multi-dimensional perspectives, and practical realities. The following section offers guiding principles for ensuring that indicators contribute to meaningful improvements in children's lives in the face of climate change.

2.1 Child Rights-Based

Indicators must be grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other relevant human rights instruments.

They should reflect the full spectrum of children's rights - survival, development, protection, and participation - to ensure that monitoring efforts are aligned with internationally agreed-upon standards for children's well-being. In September 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child set out guidance to States parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in [General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](#)¹, including with respect to adaptation. General Comment 26, excerpts of which are highlighted in box 1, offers valuable direction for designing, implementing, and monitoring adaptation measures through a child rights lens.

Key Elements of a Child Rights Approach to Adaptation from General Comment 26

- “States **should identify climate change-related vulnerabilities among children concerning the availability, quality, equity and sustainability of essential services for children, such as water and sanitation, physical and mental health care, childcare, protection, nutrition and education.**”
- “A sharp and urgent increase in the design and implementation of **child-sensitive, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive adaptation measures**² and associated resources is necessary.”
- “States should **strengthen awareness among children and their communities** of disaster risk reduction and prevention measures.”
- “In adaptation measures [...], **due weight should be given to the views of children.**”

Box 1: Key Elements of Child Rights Approach to Climate Change Adaptation (General Comment 26)

2.2 Disaggregated for Equity and Inclusion

Indicators must be disaggregated by relevant categories such as age, sex, disability, geographic location, socio-economic status, and ethnicity to effectively address inequalities and ensure that no child is left behind.

Data disaggregation is crucial for revealing disparities and monitoring the differentiated impacts of climate change. Children, particularly young children, girls, children with disabilities, displaced children, and poor children, are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and at a significantly higher risk of physical harm than adults. Understanding children's specific needs and heightened vulnerabilities is essential for governments and stakeholders to develop targeted and effective solutions. The current scarcity of disaggregated data hinders the ability to accurately track climate change impacts on vulnerable groups and, consequently, limits the capacity to address growing inequalities. Data disaggregation is vital for indicators of all targets, including those measuring progress against targets of paragraph 10. Collecting and analyzing disaggregated data informs each stage of the policy cycle, providing critical insights into the differentiated impacts of climate change and guiding targeted interventions for marginalized groups. Data disaggregation should build on established frameworks and tools such as those developed by [Interagency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal indicators](#).

Disaggregation example SDG target 1.2 “By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.”

Target 1.2 includes the following indicators:

1.2.1: Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, **by sex and age**

1.2.2: Proportion of **men, women and children of all ages** living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

Box 2: SDG Indicators age- and sex-disaggregation example

2.3 Age appropriate

Indicators must be age-appropriate and sensitive to children’s developmental stages.

They should reflect the best science of impacts on children rather than general population. [Children are uniquely vulnerable to climate change, facing health challenges that set them apart from adults. They face unique vulnerabilities to climate hazards at every stage of life](#) from fetal development to adolescence.

Therefore, selected metrics should take into account age-specific impacts of climate change throughout the

¹ General Comment No.26 is the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s authoritative guidance on how children’s rights are impacted by the environmental crisis and what governments must do to uphold these rights to ensure that children live in a clean, healthy and sustainable world.

² Responsiveness refers to the design and implementation approach that acknowledges and addresses the different needs, realities and experiences of people by age, disability and gender.

development stages to address children's varying needs at each stage of childhood and recognise the importance of each stage for subsequent stages of maturation and development. Drawing on established frameworks such as [WHO guidelines on child health and development](#), which emphasize developmental milestones and age-specific indicators, ensures that monitoring efforts are grounded in scientific understanding of child development.

2.4 Holistic and Multi-dimensional

A balanced set of indicators should reflect the complex interplay of factors affecting children's lives and well-being.

Indicators should capture the interconnected nature of children's well-being, recognizing that climate change impacts multiple aspects of their lives simultaneously. Instead of focusing on single issues in isolation, a holistic approach considers how climate hazards cascade across different systems and affect children's overall development. For example, a flood might not only displace a family (protection issue) but also contaminate water sources (health issue), disrupt schooling (education issue), and increase family stress (health and social well-being issue). A holistic and multi-dimensional approach to indicator development allows countries to gain accurate and nuanced understanding of climate change impacts on children. Cross-cutting indicators would monitor how climate change affects the *systems* that support children, specifically health systems, education systems and child protection systems. Examples include tracking the functionality of health facilities during climate disasters, or assessing the capacity of social services to respond to climate-related displacement of families.

2.5 Child Participation and Safeguarding

The process of developing, collecting, and using indicators should involve children and young people, where appropriate and safe.

Representing a third of the population and one of the most affected by climate change impacts, children's and young people's participatory approaches are important to ensure child-sensitivity of indicators. Participatory approaches enhance the relevance and validity of indicators by incorporating children's lived experiences and perspectives and ensure responsiveness to the context-specific nature of adaptation challenges and needs. Organizations working with children should adhere to stringent safeguarding policies that include ethical guidelines for research and data collection. UNICEF, for instance, provides specific ethical guidance for research and data collection involving children. A recent pilot project by UNICEF Australia, in partnership with the Young and Resilient Research Centre (Y&R), exemplifies a participatory approach. This project developed 47 indicators for climate change and climate action, including outcomes related to resilient infrastructure and communities, by directly incorporating children and young people's insights. These [indicators](#) – which put children's perspectives at their center – demonstrate the value of child participation in shaping relevant and impactful indicators

3. The Case for Child-Specific Indicators under Target 10a

The development of indicators for target 10a should explicitly include child-sensitive metrics within hazard, exposure, and vulnerability assessments. Target 10a of the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience mandates comprehensive impact, vulnerability, and risk assessments by 2030³. To ensure meaningful planning for climate adaptation, including across the seven thematic targets, these assessments must disaggregate risks by population groups, explicitly considering children. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) risk assessment framework defines climate risk as a function of hazard, exposure, and vulnerability. While this model has guided climate assessments globally, its application often remains generic and lacks child-sensitive differentiation. The absence of child-specific considerations in vulnerability and risk assessments undermines effective adaptation planning.

To effectively integrate children into climate risk assessments, the following dimensions of the IPCC framework must be disaggregated:

Hazard Identification

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- Incorporate child-specific *physiological vulnerabilities* (e.g., heat sensitivity, dehydration risk).

³ "(a) Impact, vulnerability and risk assessment: by 2030 all Parties have conducted up-to-date assessments of climate hazards, climate change impacts and exposure to risks and vulnerabilities and have used the outcomes of these assessments to inform their formulation of national adaptation plans, policy instruments, and planning processes and/or strategies, and by 2027 all Parties have established multi-hazard early warning systems, climate information services for risk reduction and systematic observation to support improved climate-related data, information and services" (Decision 2/CMA.5)

- Utilize data collection methodologies tailored to capture hazard impacts across *different developmental stages*.

Exposure Analysis

- Adequately capture data on children's *proximity to high-risk environments* (flood zones, informal settlements).
- Factor in children's *dependence on caregivers* and *limited mobility* in hazard avoidance.
- Include *schools, childcare, and health facilities* as critical exposure sites in climate risk analyses.

Vulnerability Assessment

- Assess how climate hazards (heatwaves, floods, disease) *disproportionately impact* children's health, nutrition, and essential services.
- Conduct age-disaggregated vulnerability assessments to reflect systemic disadvantages faced by younger populations (poor nutrition, lack of adaptive capacity).
- Integrate multi-dimensional child poverty indicators to recognize heightened risks for marginalized children.
- Thoroughly analyze impacts on social service sectors, such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), as major determinants of child health and well-being within the vulnerability assessment framework.

By embedding children's unique risks into climate risk assessments, countries are better positioned to:

- **Inform Thematic Targets:** Prioritize interventions and target adaptation finance to address the greatest climate risks faced by children, particularly in disrupting essential social services.
- **Enhance National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and sectoral policies:** Ensure policies are relevant and effective by accounting for the differentiated needs of children.
- **Enable cross-sectoral planning:** Link child-sensitive risk assessments to adaptation strategies in health, education, WASH, social protection and nutrition fostering a system-wide approach to child protection in climate action.

For Target 10a to truly contribute to global climate resilience, the expert group developing indicators is urged to prioritize the integration of child-specific metrics. This will enhance the quality and usability of climate risk data, enable better adaptation planning, and ultimately ensure that climate resilience strategies are inclusive, equitable, and effectively protect children – the most vulnerable – from the escalating impacts of climate change.

4. UNICEF's Commitment to Support Parties

UNICEF is the global custodian of data for children and supports member states to monitor the Sustainable Development Goal indicators related to children. The organization is committed to supporting Parties in developing, collecting, analysing and reporting on child-sensitive and child-specific indicators within the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience. This commitment includes providing technical assistance to national authorities to strengthen national monitoring systems, ensuring that data are robust and effectively integrated into national and global monitoring frameworks, and doing so within a coordinated effort by UN agencies and other organizations.

UNICEF has played a leading role in the development of new standards and data collection methods for monitoring child wellbeing. For over three decades, the [Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#) programme has systematically strengthened the capacity of national statistical authorities worldwide to collect high-quality child-related data. Furthermore, UNICEF actively supports the enhancement of censuses and administrative data systems, including civil registration and vital statistics systems, and sectoral management information systems, all of which are vital for comprehensive child-focused data collection.

UNICEF stands ready to support Parties in incorporating children and young people's specific needs and perspectives in the development of global indicators.