

General Comment

Child rights, environment and climate change

A stylized illustration of a hand holding a magnifying glass over a globe. The globe is depicted with green landmasses and blue oceans. The hand is brown and holds a black magnifying glass. The background is a light blue sky with green foliage and orange flowers at the bottom. The text is centered over the globe.

First Draft General Comment No. 26 Child Friendly Version



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important agreement by countries who have promised to protect children's rights. The Convention explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities of governments. All the rights are connected, they are all equally important and they cannot be taken away from children.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is a group of 18 experts in children's rights who come from all over the world. The Committee meets three times per year in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss how children's rights are being promoted and respected in each country that has signed the Convention. The Committee also makes recommendations to each country on how they can improve children's rights.

The Committee is creating guidance for governments called a General Comment to explain how children's rights are related to the environment and climate change, and what governments must do to protect them.

Now, the first draft is ready. This version of the first draft is for children.



Introduction

"I would like to tell them [adults] that we are the future generations and if you destroy the planet, where will we live?!" **Boy, 13, India**

Environmental harm is an urgent, significant threat to children's rights globally. Children have a right to be protected from environmental harm. Children are demanding urgent action, and their rights must be protected. This General Comment explains why urgent environmental and climate action is needed and what governments must do to protect all the rights children have.

Children's incredible efforts to stand up for their environmental rights inspired the Committee to create this General Comment. Children have played a very important role in shaping this first draft: 7416 children from 103 countries shared their views and ideas in a global consultation that was designed with members of the General Comment No. 26 Children's Advisory Team.



The children's quotes in the draft General Comment, and this version, are from the consultation report which can be found at: childrightsenvironment.org/reports/

Key Concepts

The General Comment explains four very important ideas.

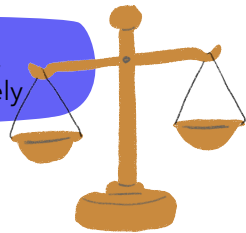
1 Sustainable development



Governments must make sure they consider the needs of different countries, generations and groups of children and adults when making decisions, and must balance social and economic development with environmental protection.

2 Intergenerational equity

The interests of, and decisions made by, current generations should not negatively impact future generations.



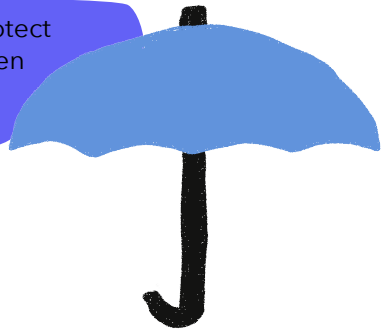
3 Best available science



Governments must use evidence given by scientists to form their decisions.

4 Precautionary principle

Governments must take action to protect children from environmental risks even if these risks are not clearly known.



How are children's rights related to the environment and climate change?



Right to life, survival and development

Children should be able to live, grow up and develop (physically, mentally, spiritually and socially) in healthy, safe environments and have the support they need at different ages. Their lives should never be put at risk because of environmental harm like pollution or lead exposure.



Right to health

Children's physical and mental health should not be affected by climate change, pollution, unhealthy ecosystems, and loss of biodiversity. If a child experiences health issues, they must be able to access healthcare and support.



Right to education

Children should be taught environmental education that is accurate and in ways that they understand. Environmental education should support children to connect with, and respect, the environment and other human beings. The places where children learn should be safe from environmental harm.



Right to a decent standard of living

Children should be able to access safe food, clean water, good housing and other materials needed for them to live and grow. Governments need to make sure children are not living in poverty or unsafe environments.



Right to rest and play

Children should be able to play and be active in clean, safe places and connect with our natural world. Governments need to consider where and how children can play and rest when they develop places where people live.



Rights of Indigenous children

Indigenous children's lives, survival and cultural practices are often very connected with their natural environment. Governments should make sure to protect their rights and involve children in all decisions being made about their lives.



Right of non-discrimination

No group of children (for example, girls or children with disabilities) should suffer from environmental problems more than others. Governments should collect information to learn more about the inequalities between groups, and take specific actions to resolve them.



Best interests of the child

When making decisions about the environment and climate change, governments and businesses must consider how children will be impacted, and how it will support the wellbeing and development of children today and in the future.



Right to be heard

Children should have a say on issues related to the environment and climate change, and to be taken seriously by adults. Governments and businesses should involve children when making decisions about the environment and climate change.



Right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly

Children often stand up for their environmental rights as human rights defenders. Many children also spend time with friends and groups in different environments. Governments must protect children from anyone who wants to stop them from doing so.



Right to access justice

When children's rights have been affected by environmental harm and climate change, children should be able to access justice - that is, solutions, support and compensation for the harm and consequences they are experiencing - at regional and international levels.



Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

While this right is not directly included in the Convention, the Committee explains that children have the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Children need a clean environment in order to enjoy all of their human rights. Children should have access to clean air and water, safe climates, healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, healthy food and non-polluted environments.

What should your government do to protect your rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and in the context of climate change?

All governments that have signed the Convention (which is all but one country in the world) must follow certain rules.

"Global warming and other problems cannot be solved unless there is global cooperation." **Girl, 11, China**

Governments should not:

1. Create environmental problems that affect the rights of the child.
2. Support activities that lead to climate change.
3. Exclude children from decisions being made about the environment and climate change.
4. Prevent children from taking part in environmental and climate action.



Governments should:

1. Carry out regular Child Rights Impact Assessments to understand (and resolve) how their decisions about the environment will impact (or are impacting) children – paying special attention to how different groups of children might be impacted differently.
2. Provide clear information to children about how they can protect themselves and others from environmental harm and climate change.
3. Adopt laws to prevent companies from polluting the environment and harming children, and to make sure companies do not not lie about their environmental impact.
4. Work together with other governments as environmental problems do not stop at the border. Countries that most negatively impact the environment should have to take more action than others, and support countries that are impacted the most.
5. Make sure that activities designed to respond to climate change do not negatively impact children's rights.
6. Follow what scientists tell us about climate change and the importance of taking action now.
7. Keep their promises to limit the warming of the planet.
8. Protect children who are already experiencing the effects of climate change. Strengthen school buildings and water pipes against storms, flooding and other weather extremes, and provide food supplies in cases of emergency.
9. Include children in the development of plans, decisions and solutions.
10. Consider children's rights in all decisions made about climate change and consider climate change in all decisions being made about children.



You are invited to share your views with the Committee on the first draft.
Find out more at: childrightsenvironment.org/get-involved

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