



Photo: Jakob Studnar

# Children's Rights and Climate Justice

Version 2025

This paper equips KNH staff and KNH partner organisations around the globe to communicate climate and child rights topics with internal and external stakeholders. As a child rights organisation, KNH is committed to climate justice and the fulfillment of children's rights globally.

1.



## Children have a right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Children have a right to grow up in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as recognized in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No. 26](#) (2023), and the Human Rights Council (2021) resolution recognising the universal human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. State governments have committed to cooperate globally to ensure children's rights, to reduce climate change and to ensure environmental protection.

2.



## The climate crisis is a child rights crisis

Children's right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and other rights to survival, development, participation and protection are inextricably linked. Children's rights violations are exacerbated by the effects of climate change and the increasing frequency and intensity of droughts, floods, landslides, typhoons, heat waves, forest fires, melting of glaciers and rising sea levels. Such disasters result in losses and damages, including deaths, injuries, disease, food insecurity, hunger, and acute malnutrition, especially among children. Education is disrupted, and children face increased risks of economic exploitation and sexual exploitation due to poverty, displacement and migration.

### 3. **Human activities drive the climate crisis and root causes need to be addressed**

Human actions are the primary driver of the climate crisis. The international scientific consensus is that burning of fossil fuels, changes in land use and deforestation have significantly contributed to the unprecedented increase in greenhouse gas concentrations in the Earth's atmosphere and cause climate change. Hence, addressing the climate crisis and its root causes requires urgent and comprehensive action by governments, non-state actors and individuals globally.

### 4. **The climate crisis is unjust, for both current and future generations**

There is increasing evidence that climate change exacerbates underlying economic, health, social, and gender inequities and discrimination. It disproportionately harms marginalized groups, such as indigenous and nomadic groups, those facing chronic poverty, children with disabilities, or girls. Climate justice requires efforts to combat climate change to be fair and equitable, ensuring that particularly affected groups are protected.

### 5. **Governments and other private and civil society actors must act together NOW to protect children's rights threatened by climate change!**

By prioritizing climate justice and taking action in mitigation and adaptation, all actors need to effectively work (together) towards protecting and fulfilling children's rights.

- **Mitigation:** refers to human interventions to reduce emissions or to prevent and enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases. It also includes efforts to decrease or offset the impacts of climate change, including adopting renewable energy sources and preserving natural ecosystems to maintain biodiversity and carbon sinks.
- **Adaptation:** responding to changing climate and building resilience to minimize harm from climate-related events, ensuring that children are included in disaster preparedness and recovery plans, especially at the school and community level.



To systematically address the impact of climate change on the effectiveness and sustainability of its work and initiatives, KNH developed a Global Program Strategy on Children's Rights and Climate Justice (GPS CR&CJ).

The GPS builds upon experience in child rights-based and community-based work.

With the GPS,  
**KNH aims to address climate justice and fulfilment of child rights** through the following main commitments (among others):

## Empowering Children and Young People in Climate Action

Despite increasing efforts by children and young people in diverse locations to organise themselves and speak up for climate action, children's participation and representation remains absent or side-lined. KNH recognises and promotes that children and young people must have opportunities, support and access to participate in climate related policy and practice decisions from local to global levels to increase child-focused climate actions, climate justice and government accountability. In many key policy and practice forums the space for children and youth to influence political decisions and resource allocation on climate action and children's rights must be increased.



## **Increasing advocacy for child-focused climate finance for children living in countries most affected by climate change<sup>2</sup>**

As highlighted in the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate justice is essential to addressing the climate crisis and supporting countries and communities that contribute the least but suffer the most. Thus, State governments, and donors in industrialised countries have increased responsibilities for climate finance, including funds for loss and damage, and child-focused climate actions not the least to also prevent and reduced climate related conflicts, insecurity and displacement.

## **Strengthening partnerships, communication and learning as well as Integrating Climate-Sensitive Interventions<sup>3</sup> for Children's Rights in KNH's work**

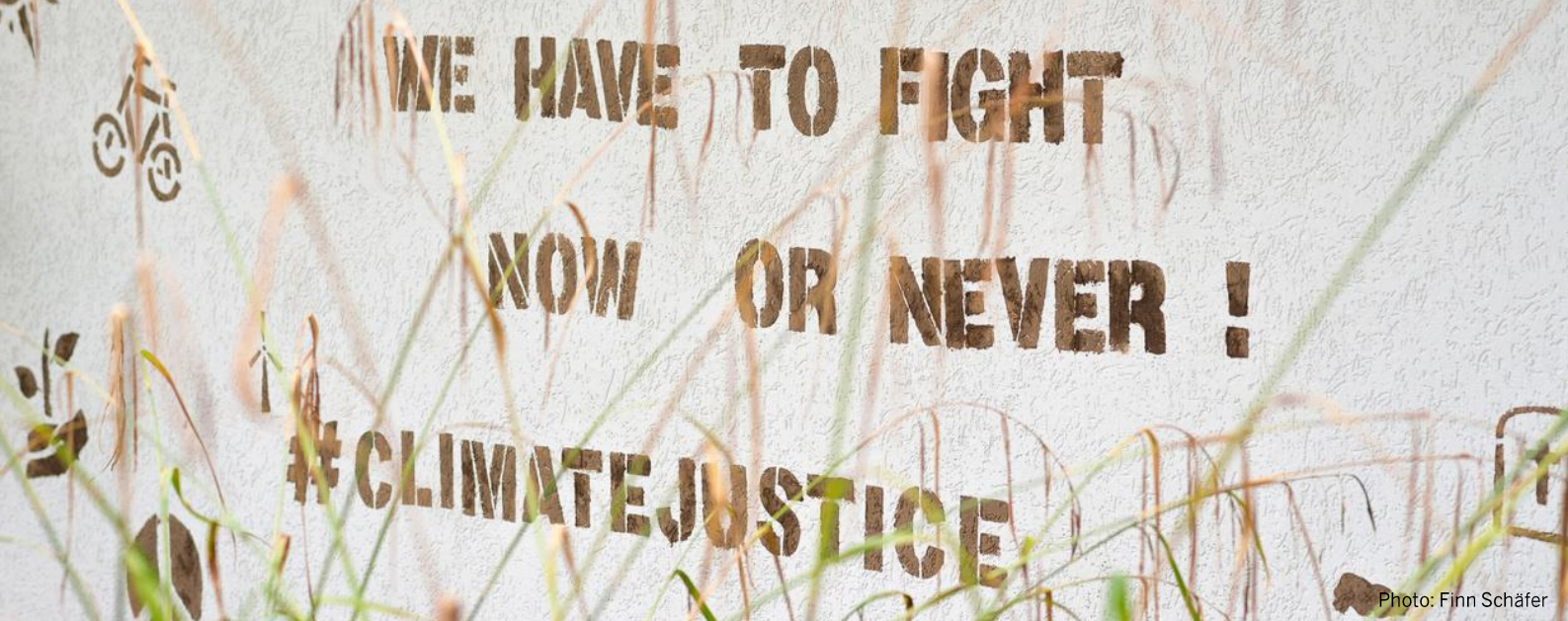
KNH and its partners adopt a child rights-based approach to strengthen partnerships and build capacity to empower children, youth, communities, and civil society to actively motivate and hold duty bearers accountable for climate action, child rights, and climate justice. KNH and partners embed climate sensitive interventions within four core children's rights to be heard, educated, protected from violence, and protected from exploitation. Additionally, they aim to expand climate actions more broadly.



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2: UNICEF: "The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index", Link: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/childrens-climate-risk-index-report/>

3: Interventions that recognize the interconnectedness of human systems and the environment, aiming to create solutions that benefit both people and the planet; following a child-rights approach to address and prevent climate change effects on the lives and rights of children.



Kindernothilfe aims to promote the following and invites partners to use these as inspiration for project planning:

## Right to Education

Measures to address obstacles preventing school participation and promote climate action:

### **Climate literacy and adaptation # #**

- Integrate climate change, life-skill-based learning, and climate justice into school curricula and develop advocacy tools and approaches to promote inclusion of climate change and climate justice in National Education Policies.
- Offer climate education programs that empower children and youth to become active agents of change to spread knowledge in their communities and mobilize for climate action (e.g. through theaters, radio, ICT, etc) and utilize social media to amplify children's voices in advocating for climate justice and sustainable development
- Implement whole-school approaches for "green" living and environmental protection: enable students to plant and grow trees and indigenous plants, to harvest rainwater, switch to renewable energies, and to reduce plastics to cultivate an ethos of environmental care, etc.
- Support school-based child-focused disaster risk reduction initiatives, e.g. develop participatory resilience plans and early warning systems, pro-actively involving out-of-school children and children with disabilities.



## Access to education #

- Support alternative forms of education, like mobile schools and flexible learning concepts during and following climate induced emergencies (and potentially permanently for children who face barriers to access formal education due to climate-related factors, e.g. in remote areas)
- Support awareness rising for the importance of education for young women and girls even in the face of economic challenges enhanced by climate risks
- Address climate-induced heat risk e.g. through climate-adapted school buildings: incorporating sustainable architecture techniques and materials such as the use of bamboo or hemp to create cooler classroom environments.
- Address weather-based transportation disruption to school, e.g. by robust road networks and improved infrastructure that also allows children with disabilities to access schools

## Right to Participation

- Support children's participation and representation in political platforms relating to climate and environmental protection at local, national and international levels for children and youth to bring forward their demands and influence decision-making.
- Fund and support child and youth led climate action and advocacy initiatives, especially at the community, sub-national and national level to foster leadership and solidarity among children and youth.
- Support community-based child-focused disaster risk reduction, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience building activities and advocate for consideration of child specific needs in governance emergency plans and early warning system.
- Develop and disseminate child-friendly accessible information on climate change, climate actions, children's rights, and climate justice.
- Support child/ youth focused climate litigation cases and/or other avenues for remedies to justice, including access to courts for children and youth, and key stakeholders like indigenous communities who protect 80% of global biodiversity.



# Protection from Violence and Exploitation

## Natural resources #

- Guarantee / provide access to (nearby) clean water in combination with supporting community dialogue and sensitisation to reduce sexual harassment and abuse of girls and women, for example, while they are collecting water.
- Advocate for diversified agricultural practices, regeneration and farming techniques that nourish the soil (e.g. organic gardening) in combination with youth training on diversified income-generating activities, labour laws and ways of protection from economic exploitation and child labour.

## Capacities and protection #

- Build capacity of key stakeholders (adults, young people and children, including members of community-based protection groups, caregivers, traditional and religious elders) to transform harmful gender and social norms and to ensure climate adaptation, mitigation, and response to protection risks that are enhanced due to climate change, such as child labour, gender-based violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, forced early marriage, or other harmful practices etc.
  - Empower communities economically, socially, and politically (e.g. through People Institutions (SHG) Approach) to promote children's rights, including efforts to prevent above mentioned protection risks.
  - Form 'Community based Child Protection Committees' with clear linkages to formal protection systems at sub-national and national levels to assess, prevent and address different forms of violence and exploitation, (changing challenges connected to climate change, e.g. rising violence in families due to climate related economic pressures - harvest loss etc)

## Business and evidence #

- Advocate for obligatory human rights and environmental standards (and their enforcement) for the private sector like extractive resource industries, fashion industry and other labour-intensive sectors to reduce environmental exploitation and exploitation of children and youth.
- Conduct research/studies to generate evidence and recommendations for actions regarding the impact of climate change on protection of children. Share the findings with relevant stakeholders, particularly duty bearers





## Right to survival and development (mitigation focus)

- Support the transition to renewable energies, sustainable mobility and radically reduce fossil fuel emissions, including advocacy to: remove subsidies for kerosene; reduce reliance on fossil fuel in national power generation; increase funding and lower administrative hurdles for solar power and other renewables.
- Promote the renaturalization and protection of moorlands, swamps, forests, and other ecosystems to ensure safe environments for children
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms for governments to ensure healthy air quality and to eradicate air pollution, currently affecting almost all children globally.



Photo: KNH-Partner

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