unicef
for every child

Children's Climate Risk Report 2026

Executive summary

Suggested citation: *Children's Climate Risk Report 2026*. Florence: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 IGO.

Cover photo: In March 2025, tropical storm Jude destroyed the secondary school classroom of Christianah, an 11-year-old student in Madagascar. The storm affected more than 26,000 people, displacing nearly half of those impacted. UNICEF collaborated with its partners on disaster preparedness, post-storm response and sustainable recovery.

Executive summary

While climate hazards have always occurred naturally, human-induced global warming is already changing much of the world as we know it. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, several climate hazards have increased in frequency and intensity, and often overlap.

New, more granular data in this report reveals the staggering number of children already exposed to climate-related hazards globally. The scale of this exposure underscores the urgency of the crisis. Almost all children are now exposed to at least one of the following climate hazards:

- riverine floods
- coastal floods
- droughts
- tropical storms
- heatwaves
- extreme heat
- fires
- sand and dust storms

The impact on children's physical and mental health and wellbeing and their access to education and protection is huge, yet barely quantified.

Storms and floods displace families and interrupt daily life. Record-smashing heat causes widespread heatstroke and dehydration. Droughts cause food and nutritional insecurity. These climate hazards exacerbate deadly infectious diseases, such as dengue and malaria, and lead to air-polluting wildfires.

Children are disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate hazards, as their developing bodies make it harder for them to cope with the physical and psychological stresses. They also increasingly experience displacement and instability in the wake of climate shocks, further worsening their vulnerabilities.

But while the climate crisis is a global phenomenon, its effects are not felt equally. Children are not a homogeneous group. They are affected in different ways and to varying degrees depending on their age, gender, disability and ethnicity (including Indigenous identity). Some children are far more exposed than others due to limited access to essential social services because of their location or socio-economic status. This leads to overlapping vulnerabilities.

About this report

Without identifying who the most vulnerable children are, where they live, and how they are affected by climate-related impacts, developing practical and effective solutions for adaptation and disaster risk reduction is nearly impossible.

The *Children's Climate Risk Report* provides the most comprehensive picture to date of the threat to children from the climate crisis and its impacts. In an unprecedented level of detail, it shows how children's exposure to multiple, overlapping climate hazards, combined with their inherent physical vulnerabilities and gaps in the social services they rely on, undermines their rights and increases their risk of harm.

Using new UNICEF datasets, this report presents high resolution estimates for a range of climate hazards that affect children. It also considers two hazards that are not primarily driven by Earth's climate but are highly sensitive to and compounded by it – vector-borne diseases (malaria) and air pollution.

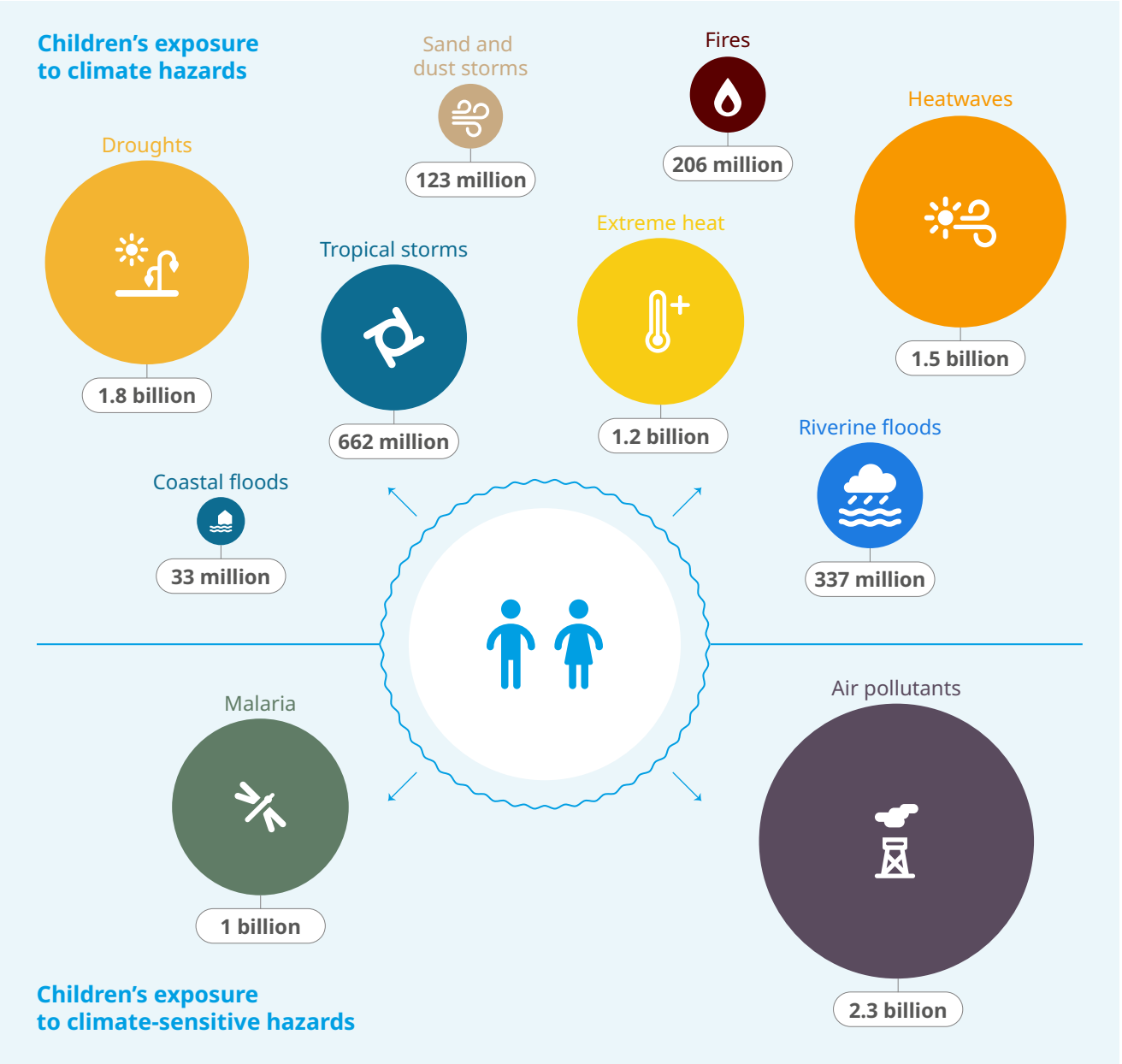
The analysis of hazards is linked to data on coverage of essential social services that directly affect children's vulnerability and capacity to cope with the climate crisis, including health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education, child protection, and social protection services. This evidence is presented in a framework that governments and partners can use to identify where children are most at risk from climate-related hazards and act to reduce children's climate vulnerabilities.

Children's exposure to hazards

Climate hazards can occur anywhere. However, they only become a risk when they overlap with where people, livelihoods or other assets are; that is, where people are exposed to the hazard.

Children's exposure to hazards varies widely between and within countries. When hazards are geographically concentrated, they may affect children in one region of a country while others remain relatively unaffected. In such a context, governments can redirect resources and target the children affected. Risks are serious but remain localized. In other countries, when entire territories are exposed, almost all children can be affected at once. Health systems, schools, water and sanitation services, and social

Figure 1: Overview of the number of children exposed to climate-related hazards



protection systems come under simultaneous strain. In such a context, risks are no longer local but system-wide.

The capacity of governments to protect and support children to cope with and adapt to climate hazards varies widely depending on income, fragility and wider structural constraints, particularly in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs).

Multiple overlapping hazards

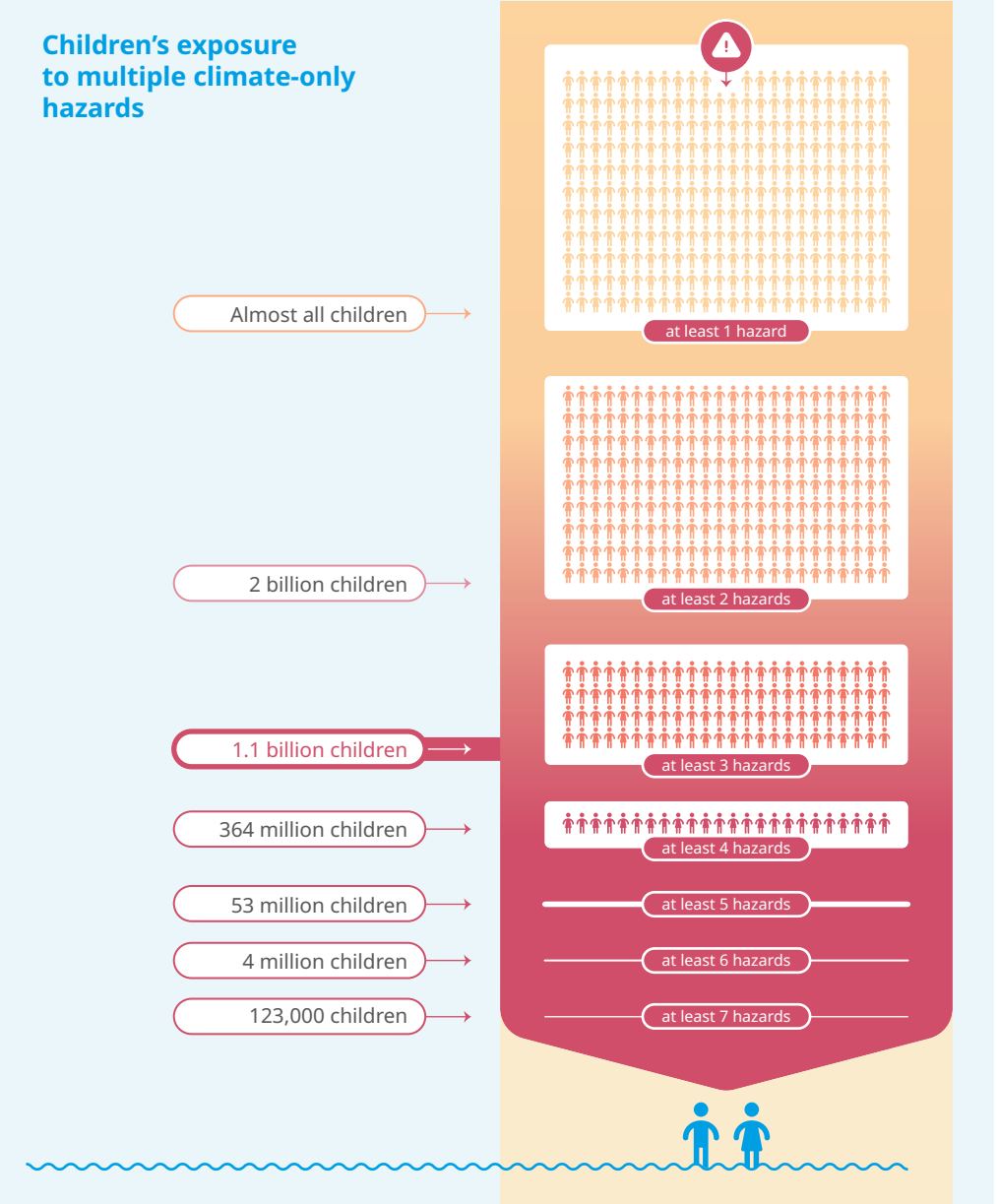
Globally, 1.1 billion children are exposed to at least three overlapping climate hazards.

The climate crisis does not manifest as a single event. For millions of children, the reality is a complex and dangerous cascade of multiple, overlapping hazards. This compounding of threats overwhelms the capacity of unprepared social services and undermines the resilience of families and communities.

For instance, intense droughts can devastate crops and worsen food insecurity. Dry vegetation left behind by a drought can fuel wildfires, which in turn exacerbate air pollution and leave the land vulnerable to flash floods later in the year. These floods can destroy infrastructure such as homes, schools and hospitals, displace communities and spread waterborne diseases.

These effects can create a vicious cycle: destroyed homes can lead to displacement, which can result in a lack of shelter, depriving children of protection from additional impacts and making them even more susceptible to future hazards. Disrupted education can have lifelong consequences, making it harder for children to build a stable future and break free from hardship.

Figure 2: Overview of the number of children exposed to multiple climate hazards



Absolute and relative exposure

Unsurprisingly, countries with large child populations consistently appear at the top of the absolute exposure lists. In countries with massive child and youth populations – such as **Bangladesh**, **India**, **Nigeria** and **Pakistan** – even if in some cases the relative percentage of children exposed to multiple climate hazards is low, the absolute number exposed is still high. Conversely, countries with relatively low absolute populations, especially in SIDS and LLDCs, often experience the highest relative exposure to individual climate hazards, reflecting the high concentration of specific risks across their territories.

Multi-hazard intensity

Multi-hazard intensity analysis distinguishes areas that experience frequent but mild events from those that face less frequent but more devastating events. High intensity multi-hazard exposures are often greatest in the most populated countries, such as **Egypt**, **India**, **Nigeria** and **Pakistan**. When examining the relative exposure of children to multi-hazard intensity, we find that children in the Sahel are the most exposed, especially in **Burkina Faso**, **Central African Republic**, **Mali**, **South Sudan** and **Sudan**.

Children's vulnerability

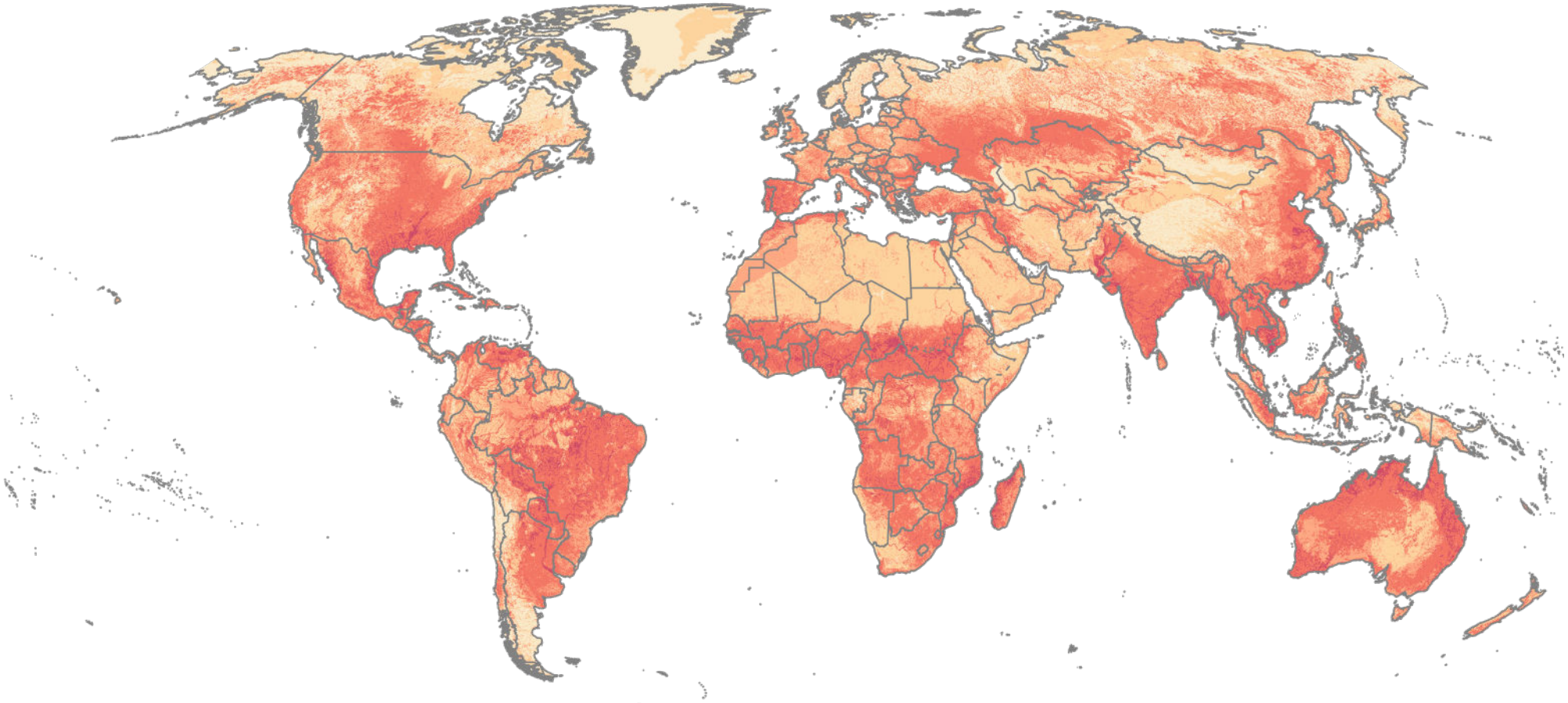
A climate hazard becomes a disaster only when it disrupts the lives and livelihoods of individuals, families and communities. For a child, vulnerability is defined both by biological sensitivity and coping capacity. This coping capacity is measured through access to essential social services children rely on to survive and thrive. When these systems are weak, inaccessible or not resilient to climate shocks, children's lives are at risk.

This report examines six key service areas critical to children's resilience to climate hazards:

1. **Health services:** In 2024, 20 million children missed out on life-saving vaccines, including 14.3 million children who did not receive a single dose of a diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis-containing vaccine. Climate shocks could further worsen existing vulnerabilities by destroying clinics, disrupting vaccine cold chains and increasing the spread of diseases.
2. **Nutrition services:** Droughts and floods devastate crops, disrupt food supply chains and drive malnutrition. Without timely action, climate change is estimated to cause an additional 28 million children to be wasted and 40 million children to be stunted globally by 2050.
3. **Water, sanitation and hygiene services:** In 2024, 634 million children still lacked safely managed drinking water, 1 billion lacked safely managed sanitation and 489 million lacked basic hygiene. Floods contaminate water sources and droughts dry them up, leaving children vulnerable to deadly diseases and increasing burdens such as fetching water.
4. **Education services:** Storms destroy schools and heatwaves disrupt learning, robbing children of their future. In 2024 alone, at least 242 million students in 85 countries and territories had their schooling disrupted by climate-related hazardous events.
5. **Child protection services:** Climate-driven displacement and poverty increase the risks of child labour, child marriage and family separation. Between 2016 and 2023, there were 62.1 million internal displacements of children from climate hazards, the equivalent of more than 21,000 child displacements per day.
6. **Social protection services:** Families without access to shock-responsive cash transfers or other support are compelled into negative coping mechanisms. Over 130 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030 because of climate change.

The ability of governments to reduce children's vulnerability and increase their capacity to cope with and adapt to climate hazards is often affected by wider structural constraints,

Map 1: **Areas with exposure to multiple hazards at the highest intensities for eight hazard subsets – riverine floods, coastal floods, tropical storms, droughts, heatwaves, extreme heat, fires, and sand and dust storms**



Multi-hazard intensity exposure (index)

Very low (0–1.7) Low (1.7–4.0) Medium (4.0–5.1) High (5.1–7.1) Very high (7.1–10)

especially in low income countries, fragile states, SIDS and LLDCs. While these important factors are not quantified in the Children's Climate Risk Framework, they can have far reaching impacts on children's vulnerability and are important to consider as contextual information in addition to the analysis presented.

Children's climate risk analysis

This report presents a framework for assessing where children are most at risk and argues that risk-informed decisions are best made based on a systematic analysis of hazard exposure and vulnerability that considers the specific country context.

The latest available data on children's hazard exposure and child-specific vulnerabilities can be used to support different types of risk analysis, depending on the context:

- **Hazard-specific risk analysis** can help governments, humanitarian and development organizations develop targeted interventions in response to specific hazards, such as establishing early warning systems and planning infrastructure.
- **Sector-specific risk analysis** can help ministries identify hazards that compound specific types of child vulnerability in child-critical social sectors and develop strategies for child-critical systems and services, such as WASH, nutrition, education, child protection, health, and social protection.
- **Multi-dimensional risk analysis** can help policy makers gain a comprehensive understanding of system-wide risk that affects multiple populations, sectors and services. Rather than addressing threats in isolation, this holistic approach can help design comprehensive national adaptation plans that protect the most marginalized communities from multiple, overlapping hazards.

A call to action: for every child

> **Upholding every child's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment requires urgent, coordinated and child-responsive climate policies, action and investment.**

To protect children, governments and partners must strengthen the climate resilience of the key sectors that shape young lives. UNICEF calls on governments and partners to:

- Reduce emissions across all sectors and take ambitious action to fulfil existing international commitments, grounded in the best available science. This includes the urgent phasing-out of fossil fuels and a just transition towards renewable energy and energy efficiency in line with 1.5°C pathways, ensuring the best interests of the child are a primary consideration.
- Protect children through inclusive climate adaptation and responses to loss and damage that prioritize the resilience of social services children rely on to survive and thrive. Ensure children and child-critical services are prioritized in national adaptation plans and sectoral strategies, disaster preparedness and response plans, and strategies to respond to loss and damage.
- Empower children and young people to meaningfully participate in climate action and a just transition by investing in climate education, knowledge and skills, and strengthening the capacity of decision makers and experts to respect children's rights to be heard, freedom of expression, and participation in decisions that affect their lives. Ensure children's needs and perspectives are reflected in local, national, regional and global decision making on climate policy and climate finance.


unicef
for every child