

Workshop

European Citizen's Summit 2024

The Climate Crisis is a Children's Rights Crisis

The climate crisis is a children's rights crisis:

A workshop organised by Defence for Children International (DCI) Belgium, Save the Children, the UNICEF Office for Relations with the European Institutions and the Belgian National Committee for UNICEF in the context of the European Citizen's Summit 2024.

This workshop aimed to shed some light on the unique implications of the climate crisis on children and their rights and well-being and to introduce some key instruments that can be used in related (advocacy) work and activities.

This note summarizes the key messages of the workshop and provides links to relevant resources.



Introduction

Setting the stage

Philippe Henon (UNICEF Belgium)

Climate change affects children in a disproportionate way because of their unique physical and mental state. As the Save the Children's report "Born into the Climate Crisis" states, children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of heat waves, tropical storms, floods, bush fires, the lack of clean water, the increase of temperatures...

Globally, UNICEF data indicates that over 1 billion children – nearly half of the world's child population – live in countries at extremely high risk from the impacts of climate change.

However, when it comes to climate change related policies, children are quite often considered as an afterthought. While there is a need to protect children, at the same time, there is a need to recognize the enormous potential in children to help us turn the tables. Their right to be heard should be respected. We should do our utmost to guarantee a meaningful and ethical participation of children and young people in the climate debate.



Actions taken by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Benoît Van Keirsbilck (DCI Belgium and member of the UNCRC)

- Overview of how children's rights are threatened by the triple crisis of climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity. While some rights of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are particularly threatened, others help protect children's rights.
- Deep dive on the responses that the Committee on the Rights of the Child can give in relation to the climate crisis, highlighting the possibility of individual complaints, the potential of Concluding Observations and General Comment 26. Out of the Committee's responses on complaints also appears the **cross-boundary** responsibility of States to act now, as well as to act for **future generations**.
- Emphasizing the potential that children can play as human rights defenders, while also remembering that we collectively would not have been as far in actions on climate change if children did not take the action that they did.



On the need for child participation in the climate debate

Josje Beukema (Save the Children Netherlands)

- Introduction to the Generation Hope report, based on engagement with 54.500 children from 41 countries on climate change, inequality and their intersection. There are two main dimension to this intersection:
 - 1) Age – children are more vulnerable to the consequences of a warming planet, due to their physical and mental vulnerabilities;
 - 2) Income, wealth and power – children most affected by poverty, inequality and discrimination have the least protection when hit by a disaster and do not have the means for (a full) recovery. Furthermore, communities affected by discrimination have less political influence to improve their situation. This report found that 774 million children worldwide are both living in multidimensional poverty and exposed to high climate risk.
- Insights on a study conducted in the Netherlands on the influence of youth on climate policy. This research investigated how young people experience their influence, which bottlenecks and success factors they face and where they can use help. The results showed an experience of tokenism, language unsuitable for children and youth, and no feedback on their inputs. The report reiterates the importance of meaningful participation, that is inclusive and empowering. Climate action also was labeled by the young people as a positive factor to transform anxiety into something hopeful.
- The intervention underlined the importance of participation - with a particular attention towards the participation of the most vulnerable children, of creating resilience with children and young people, contributing to the development of becoming active citizens. Based on these objectives, it was also explained why it is important to focus on specific groups of kids and young people, who often do not learn about climate change and are at risk of being left behind.



Belgians first national children's climate summit

Kobe Hautekiet (UNICEF Belgium)

- In 2023, UNICEF Belgium, in partnership with different child rights and educational organizations, coordinated a first national Children's Climate Summit in Brussels. Inviting over 120 children between 10 and 12 years old, representing 19 delegations, to discuss topics like climate adaptation, mitigation and justice with each other and with climate experts attending the international climate negotiations.
- **The objective of the summit was to create a positive project informed by the basic principles of children's participation**, to help realize children's right to be heard (art. 12 CRC), strengthen climate education and sensitize climate experts on the importance of providing climate communication and information towards (younger) children.
- The project existed out of three phases. The first phase aimed at the preparation of the participating children, informing them on their right to be heard and climate change. During the Summit ([link video](#)), the 2nd phase, the delegations exchanged views with each other and climate experts, after which they translated key messages and recommendations through creative workshops. The 3rd and final phase consisted of sharing the messages with policy makers and providing feedback to the children 'with more information on the outcomes and results.



European call to action on climate change

Rebekka Perdereau (UNICEF Office for Relations with European Institutions)

- Focus on the new “State of Children in the European Union” report, and more specific on the policy brief on environment, focusing on four specific impacts on children in Europe:
 - 1) Air quality & pollution
 - 2) Hazardous chemicals
 - 3) Green spaces
 - 4) Extreme weather eventsThe brief includes policy recommendations for EU-level policy makers and institutions.
- Look into results of the #EuropeKidsWant-survey, showing that climate change is no longer among the top priorities. From the focus groups it appeared that children have become disappointed and disillusioned as to the lack of action in this realm.
- UNICEF objectives for the 2024 elections and new EU political cycle are: to champion children’s rights, make EU money work for children and strengthen governance for children across EU institutions. With regards to climate change, some recommendations are, amongst others:
 - 1) an impact assessment of the EU Green Deal on children and future generations
 - 2) ask to the EU to champion the [Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action](#)
 - 3) take children into account in new [nationally determined contributions](#).

Concluding remarks

Philippe Henon (UNICEF Belgium)

The workshop managed to emphasize that the Climate Crisis is indeed a child rights crisis. It also highlighted that children are not merely victims of climate change. Children are agents of change, and we should do our utmost to listen to them and let them meaningfully participate in setting the scene and preparing, shaping and protecting the world for the future ahead.

Want to know more? Sources

- **Save the Children – Born into the climate crisis** - [BORN INTO THE CLIMATE CRISIS](#) | Save the Children International
- **Save the Children – Generation Hope report** - [Generation Hope: 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis](#) | Save the Children’s Resource Centre
- **UNICEF – Children’s Climate Risk Index** - [The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis](#) | UNICEF
- **UNICEF – State of Children in the European Union Report** - [The State of Children in the European Union 2024](#) | UNICEF European Union
- **CRC – General Comment 26 and the child friendly version** - [CRC/C/GC/26: General comment No. 26 \(2023\) on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](#) | OHCHR
- **#EuropeKidsWant - Online Survey Results** – [Child Rights Manifesto](#)

