

# THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A HUNGER CRISIS: FILLING THE POLICY GAP

Children are growing up in the shadow of a climate crisis that is fast becoming a hunger crisis. Rising temperatures, relentless droughts and devastating floods are no longer abstract threats, they are daily realities that rob children of food, health, education and security. Each failed harvest and each destroyed home pushes them deeper into hunger and further from the futures they deserve.

Yet this reality is dangerously overlooked. National climate strategies largely ignore child hunger, treating it as a side issue rather than the defining challenge it has become. This omission is not accidental; it reflects a gap in political vision and the capacity to translate intent into action.

This briefing begins from a simple but urgent truth: **climate policy that leaves children out is a failed policy**. If we are serious about tackling the climate emergency, we must embed child-specific goals into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). The evidence is clear, the risks are mounting and the cost of inaction is measured in children's lives and futures.

## The issue

**“I am angry, sad, and afraid for the future generation because if climate change continues, how will the future generations survive?”**

Malmaal Primary School Student  
Papua New Guinea

2024 was the hottest year on record,<sup>i</sup> with global temperatures surpassing 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, crossing a critical threshold

of the [Paris Agreement](#). This unprecedented heat has coincided with a deepening hunger crisis; over 295 million people across 53 countries faced acute food insecurity,<sup>ii</sup> including at least 18.2 million infants born already deprived of the essential nutrition which they need to survive and thrive<sup>iii</sup>.

Today, 1 billion children are already at extremely high risk from climate-related impacts<sup>iv</sup> such as air pollution, water scarcity, heat stress and disease. Malnutrition exacerbated by climate shocks leads to stunting, wasting and higher mortality from otherwise preventable illnesses. Without urgent, targeted action, hunger and malnutrition could increase by 20% by 2050<sup>v</sup>.

## Impacts of climate change on children



### FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

In 2024, at least 18.2 million children were born into hunger<sup>vi</sup> due in part to climate change affecting weather patterns and causing droughts and heavy rainfall. *'In the past, our ancestors knew the seasons of planting and harvesting, but today we do not eat healthy food because we plant but the climate makes us not harvest at the right time.'* (16-year-old girl, Vanuatu)



### HEALTH

Children's unique metabolism and development needs mean they are especially vulnerable to climate change impacts<sup>vii</sup>. Children face greater risk of vector-borne diseases, under-nutrition, diarrhoeal diseases and heat stress than adults.<sup>viii</sup>



### EDUCATION

Climate-induced extreme weather events significantly impact children's access to education<sup>ix</sup>. More than 400 million students were affected by climate-related school closures between 2022 and 2024.<sup>x</sup> The longer children, especially girls, are out of school, the less likely are to return.<sup>xi</sup>



### MENTAL HEALTH

Extreme heat is associated with an increase in mental health problems.<sup>xii</sup> *'I'm sad and also afraid because we will no longer have coconuts available for the future, both for eating'* (Child, Solomon Islands)



### CONFLICTS AND DISPLACEMENT

Compound impacts of climate change – disrupted livelihoods, food insecurity and diminished natural resources – increase competition for resources, contributing to conflict and displacement. By 2050, an additional 143 million people across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America could be internally displaced as a result of slow onset impacts of climate change, including water stress, crop failure and sea-level rise<sup>xiii</sup>.



### CHILD PROTECTION

Severe droughts and extreme weather also affect families' livelihoods, contributing to an increased risk of violence against children, including child labour and child marriage<sup>xiv</sup>.



## The policy blind spot: Invisibility of children

“We all must be equal and our voice matters.”

15-year-old girl, Vanuatu

To understand the policy gap of climate change and hunger, World Vision analysed the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) of 84 countries, including one representing the EU bloc.<sup>1</sup>

The findings are both clear and deeply concerning: **While hunger is increasingly recognised as a climate issue, children remain largely invisible** in the policies meant to protect the most vulnerable. Alarming, 80 % of NDCs and NAPs make no reference to any form of child hunger and malnutrition as a specific concern.

This review underscores the urgent need for policies that explicitly address child hunger, ensuring that those at greatest risk from the climate crisis are seen, heard and protected.

### Understanding NDCs and NAPs

- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) outline each country's commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris Agreement.
- National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) focus on building resilience and adapting to climate impacts.

These two frameworks are complementary and should be closely aligned to strengthen national climate responses. As key policy instruments, NDCs and NAPs not only guide climate action but also serve as accountability tools, ensuring governments uphold their commitments to address the escalating impacts of climate change.

### Recognition as an issue



Hunger  
95% (n=80)

Child hunger  
18% (n=15)



Malnutrition  
60% (n=50)

Child malnutrition  
11% (n=9)

Furthermore, while the Paris Agreement specifically refers to children as agents of change in climate action, only 58% (n=49) of NDCs mention how they were involved in their design and implementation processes.

These findings reveal a critical gap in climate policy. National strategies may recognise the wider crisis of hunger and malnutrition, **yet they fail to confront its disproportionate and lasting toll on children.** A uniform approach risks obscuring the specific vulnerabilities that boys and girls face in a rapidly changing climate.

Although 60% of NDCs and NAPs mention malnutrition, **just nine countries (11% of our sample) mention any form of malnutrition to children.** Few governments move beyond **recognition to make concrete, costed commitments.** This omission, combined with the hunger crisis, threatens not only the wellbeing of those most at risk but the resilience of society at large. Malnutrition in early childhood has lifelong consequences, affecting physical growth, cognitive development and future potential.<sup>xv</sup>

**This policy blind spot underscores the urgency behind World Vision's ENOUGH Campaign, which demands child-specific climate responses and targeted nutrition investments.**

<sup>1</sup> Due to the lack of globally agreed definition of hunger, this study also used the terms *food insecurity*, *malnutrition*, and *stunting*, were used as key search words. Refer to the Appendix for details on the methodology. The NDCs and NAPs reviewed were the those submitted prior to April 2024.



## Investing in child nutrition leads to healthier children and stronger communities

“ ‘Because we all must be equal and our voice matters.’

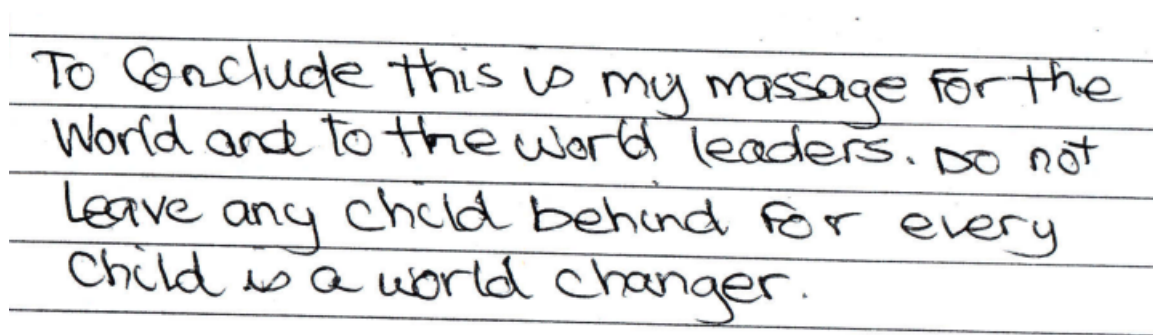
15-year-old girl, Vanuatu

Investing in child nutrition is not only a moral obligation, but also a **strategic investment in resilience, equity and development**. Children are a barometer of societal well-being, and their health and development are directly linked to the strength and sustainability of their communities. Evidence from World Vision and Ernst & Young Australia found that every US\$1 of child-related Official Development Assistance directly or indirectly results in a US\$10 return, demonstrating the high value of investing in children.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Decision makers must act now

*‘To conclude this is my message for the world and to the world leaders. Do not leave any child behind for every child is a world changer.’*

Malmal Primary School student, Papua New Guinea



To Conclude this is my message for the World and to the world leaders. Do not leave any child behind for every child is a world changer.

Securing a resilient future demands more than promises, it requires investment and commitments that place children at the centre of climate action. National plans and funding must go beyond broad ambitions and embed concrete, measurable objectives that protect and empower those most at risk. This includes:

- Recognising child hunger and malnutrition as key climate issues
- Using child-specific indicators (e.g. stunting, wasting) to track progress
- Prioritising interventions that protect children from the impacts of food insecurity, including climate-resilient school meals, early childhood nutrition programmes and child-responsive social protection programmes
- Investing in nutrition-sensitive agriculture and nature-based solutions to improve

food security and dietary diversity

- Ensuring meaningful participation of children and youth in climate decision-making at all levels
- Aligning climate action with child rights frameworks for accountability and justice.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil is a pivotal opportunity to elevate **child hunger and malnutrition** as urgent priorities within the global climate agenda. Governments must seize this opportunity to embed **concrete, costed commitments** into their updated NDCs and NAPs and push for **ambitious, equity-driven and child-responsive climate policies**.

Now is the time to act if we want to protect lives and shape the future for generations to come. **Children cannot wait; we've had ENOUGH.**



## Our calls to action: Putting children at the heart of climate action

To ensure children's rights to a healthy, safe and sustainable future, World Vision calls on governments, corporations and the international community to support the full realisation of the global commitments made for child rights and climate action.<sup>2</sup> **In particular, we call on governments, corporations and the international community to ensure the following:**

### Child-responsive NDC implementation

- Strengthen NDCs with **ambitious, child-responsive targets** that uphold intergenerational equity.
- Accelerate mitigation efforts to keep the **1.5°C goal alive**, preserving ecosystems and protecting children from escalating climate impacts.

### Climate-resilient agri-food systems for nutrition and health for children

- Explicitly recognise **child hunger and malnutrition** as climate-related impacts in NDCs and NAPs.

- Include **measurable, nutrition-sensitive adaptation targets**.
- Integrate **child-specific nutrition indicators** – such as stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies – into national climate frameworks.
- Promote nature-based solutions, including Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR), to enhance food systems.
- Align climate and food policies with **health, education and social protection systems** for a holistic response to child hunger.

### Children and young people are agents for change

- Embed child rights and needs in NDCs, NAPs and climate finance frameworks.
- Ensure children's rights to environmental education and access to information for children in line with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and Action for Climate Empowerment.
- Call on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to produce a special report on climate change and children, recognising their right to a safe climate.

<sup>2</sup> The global commitments include: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), and the goals of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030).

- Ensure child-friendly communication of UNFCCC decisions and ensure inclusive participation of children in climate processes.
- Invest in capacity building to enable meaningful engagement of the most vulnerable children.

Developing States and fragile contexts, in support of vulnerable children and communities, with a minimum of 20% of adaptation funding provided to fragile and conflict-affected countries.

#### Equitable access to loss and damage for children

#### Child-responsive climate finance

- Set ambitious, fair-share targets under the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), reflecting the scale of need in low-income countries.
  - Ensure at least 50% of climate finance is allocated to climate change adaptation, including policies to improve child health and nutrition.
  - Ensure finance is accessible, transparent, and responsive to children's needs, gender equality and human rights.
  - Prioritise climate financing flows to Least Developed Countries, Small Island
- Ensure that the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage is child-responsive, addressing children's rights and intergenerational inequity.
  - Ensure direct access to funding for local communities and child-focused organisations, making access to climate finance more inclusive, equitable and effective in addressing children's context-specific priorities.
  - Provide timely, adequate support to meet immediate humanitarian needs affected by climate change-related disasters and other climate change impacts.

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## Appendix on the methodology

World Vision analysed the extent to which child hunger and malnutrition are addressed in the climate policy documents of 84 countries – including the EU bloc – focusing on their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). Each document was reviewed and scored based on its recognition of the following issues: hunger, child hunger, malnutrition, and child malnutrition.

For hunger and child hunger, documents were categorised as follows:

- **Key issue:** Explicitly identified as a primary concern.
- **Sub-issue:** Mentioned but not presented as central.
- **Not recognised:** No mention at all.

Child malnutrition was assessed using three sub indicators – wasting, stunting and other forms of malnutrition. A country's document was scored according to the number of these sub-indicators it acknowledged, serving as a proxy for the overall recognition of child hunger and malnutrition.



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>xiii</sup> World Bank. (2018). *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29461>
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- <sup>xv</sup> World Food Programme. (2024). *Ending Malnutrition*. <https://www.wfp.org/ending-malnutrition>
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World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

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