GENERATION HOPE

2.4 BILLION REASONS TO END THE GLOBAL CLIMATE AND INEQUALITY CRISIS

A summary report
for children and young people

Save the Children

The climate emergency, global inequality and children

Scientists agree that the planet is overheating and the world's climate is changing due to pollution and other human activities. Some governments and leaders think this is a problem that can wait and be dealt with in the future. But climate change isn't a future problem: it's an emergency today. And it's an emergency for children.

Our world is very unequal. Children who have the least money and power are being affected the most by the climate emergency, even though they have done the least to cause it. Meanwhile, people, companies and countries with the most wealth and power are responsible for most of the greenhouse gases that are causing our planet to overheat.

> "Climate change isn't something people get to choose to believe or not: it's happening."
>
> *12-year-old boy, living in an urban slum, India*

This year, 2022, Save the Children has spoken to more than 54,500 children, living in 41 countries around the world. We asked them – and maybe even you yourself – about the climate and inequality crisis. Their answers were very clear about two things:

1. Children in all parts of the world are feeling the effects of the climate emergency.
2. Children care deeply about inequality – and recognise its links to the climate emergency.

Defining our terms

Climate emergency

We're using the term *climate emergency* – like many scientists, child activists and governments – to recognise the urgency and size of the threat caused by *climate change*. That is, the long-term change in local, regional and global weather patterns as a result of human activities that are releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane trap heat around the Earth. In the right amounts, these gases create a protective blanket that keeps the planet warm. But human activity – including burning fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal – has increased these greenhouse gases so that the blanket is getting too thick and causing the earth to get hotter. And as the world heats up, the climate is changing.[1]

The climate emergency includes disasters like floods, heatwaves, storms and droughts. It is also having a devastating impact on people's health, the food they grow and even on where they can live.

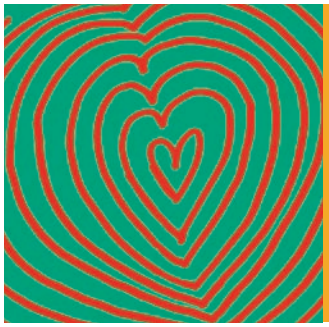
Inequality

In this report, *inequality* refers to differences in wealth, income and power. That can be between individuals, between communities or between countries.

Inequality is often related to the different opportunities different people have. The United Nations and governments around the world have agreed that all children should be treated equally and be guaranteed education, healthcare, safety, and be allowed to hold their own opinions and beliefs. These rights are detailed in an international agreement called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. But some children are prevented from enjoying these rights because they are treated unfairly due to who they are – where they live or come from, what they look like, their gender, or whether they are disabled, rich or poor. This is called discrimination, and is a major cause of inequality.

> "Poverty is a brother to climate change."
>
> *Boy, Kenya*

[1] For more information, see UNICEF's climate handbook for children, *Our Changing Climate*. Available at https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/media/1111/file/Child%20friendly%20climate%20change%20handbook.pdf



What is the combined climate and inequality crisis?

The climate emergency is deeply linked to inequality. Or, as a 14-year-old boy from the UK put it, they are **"tangled up like a bowl of spaghetti"**.

- Countries and families that are less wealthy have less protection from the impact of the climate emergency, and less support and money to adapt to climate-related change.
- The impact of the climate emergency – whether sudden disasters like flooding, cyclones and wildfires, or long-running crises like drought, disease and crop failure – often push families deeper into poverty. Families may not be able to afford to send their children to school or to get healthcare. Children may have to take up work that is dangerous, exhausting and badly paid, and girls are at greater risk of child marriage.
- Rich countries, big companies and wealthy individuals have contributed most to the climate emergency – often through the very activities that have enabled them to build up their wealth. As a result, it is these countries, companies and individuals who hold the most financial and political power. And they generally have far more influence over governments than communities affected by poverty and discrimination.

  For example, wealthy fossil fuel companies have been able to use their money to support campaigns denying that climate change is created by human activities, or implying that the changes needed are not urgent or not their responsibility. In some cases these campaigns have made people fear that government policies to tackle the climate emergency will mean they could lose their job and that prices will go up. As a result, some people, feeling their livelihood would be in danger, end up being less supportive of action to tackle the climate emergency.

Those children who have the least money or wealth and are most affected by inequality and discrimination have done the least to cause the climate emergency. But they are most affected by its impacts and are least likely to have their voices heard. This includes girls, disabled and indigenous children, and children who are discriminated against because of their race, their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or because they have had to leave their home to escape poverty or danger.

> "We are seeing temperatures rise, increased floodings, and the sea is even warmer. Not all people are financially equal, not everyone has the privilege to be able to live in a safe home."
>
> *13-year-old boy, Gaza*

> "Lack of money is pushing families to wed their daughters early, they can't afford another mouth to feed."
>
> *11-year-old girl, India*

> "My whole house was full of plants. We had squash, peaches, flowers and fruits. But we had to leave my house because everything dried up. We harvested crops and we had to move from one place. Now we are here."
>
> *11-year-old boy, originally from El Salvador, now living in Mexico*

> "We do not have electricity, so we cannot heat in the winter or turn the fans on in the summer, even though the winter has become very cold and the summer is very hot And we get sick a lot because the weather is fluctuating and the air is very polluted."
>
> *13-year-old boy, Lebanon*

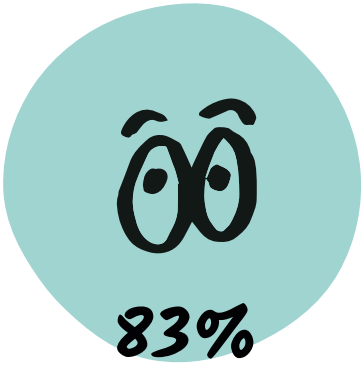
> "Children with special needs do not have access to education and are not considered to have the same rights as other children."
>
> *14-year-old girl, Somalia*

The climate and inequality crisis in numbers

The crisis is having a profound impact on children's rights, especially for children most affected by poverty and discrimination.

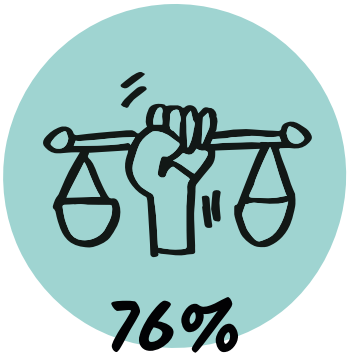
774 million

children are living in poverty and exposed to high climate risk.



83%

of children participating in our survey have noticed climate change or economic inequality affecting the world around them.



76%

of global wealth is owned by the wealthiest 10% of people globally.

Children who are most affected and have done the least to cause the crisis receive the least investment and support.

The carbon emissions of the world's wealthiest 1% are

double

those of the poorest 50%.

$9.10

is the gap in climate financing adaptation per person per year in the nine countries where children are most at risk of climate impacts.

Governments spend

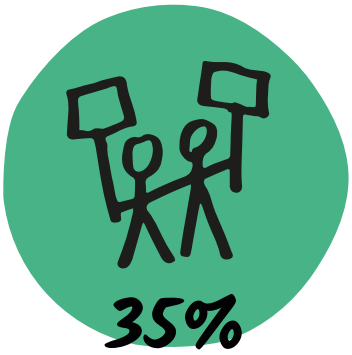
$5.9 trillion

on fossil fuel subsidies each year.

$4.2 trillion

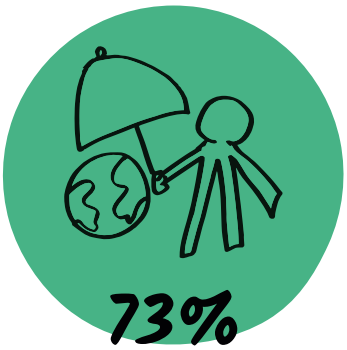
is needed per year to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in lower income countries.

Children are demanding change.



35%

of children responding to our survey said they were already campaigning or wanted to start.



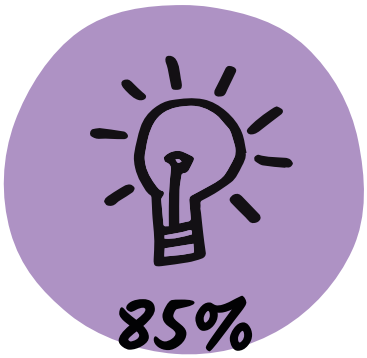
73%

of children responding to our survey believed adults should be doing more to tackle the issues.

A greener and more just planet is possible if the climate emergency and inequality are addressed together and with urgency.

139 million

additional jobs could be created by transitioning to a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient economy.



85%

- the fall in the cost of large scale solar power from 2010 to 2020.

$193 billion

in additional aid would have been available if major donors had dedicated 0.7% of GNI as aid in 2021.

$100 billion

would be saved every year responding to disasters if contingency planning, social protection and financial inclusion were improved.

$483 billion

is lost in public revenue globally each year to cross-border tax abuse. Stronger, fairer tax systems would make this available for investment in children.

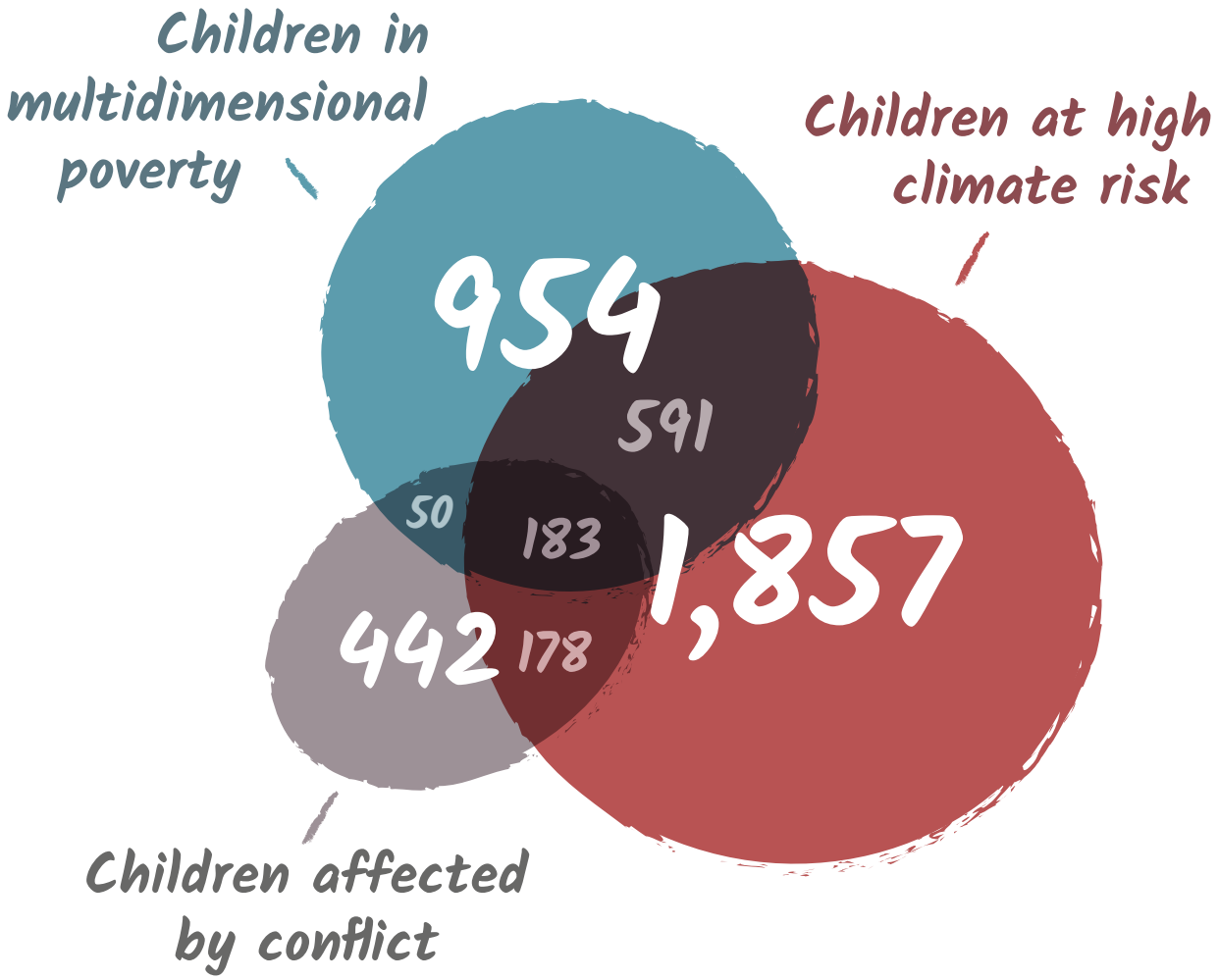
Save the Children's analysis shows that **774 million children** around the world – nearly a third of children alive today – are both living in poverty[2] and at high risk of climate-related disaster.[3] Most of these children live in lower-income countries, but 28 million live in the world's richest countries. These children are likely to be pushed further into poverty as the climate emergency gets worse.

183 million of these children face a third threat: conflict. More than half of them live in just five countries: Nigeria, India, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

> "Climate change has led to loss of soil fertility, mostly as a result of the soil nutrients being washed away. For farmers to harvest more yields, they need to use fertilisers and this works for those who are rich. Poor farmers cannot afford to buy fertilisers, hence less yields."
>
> *17-year-old boy, Malawi*

> "Children born in developed countries or countries that have never experienced any civil war are less likely to be impacted by economic inequality as their country is more stable."
>
> *Child in Somalia*

How poverty, the climate emergency and conflict risk intersect globally (millions of children affected)



[2] In this analysis, 'poverty' refers to children who are severely deprived of good healthcare, nutrition, education, housing, water and/or sanitation.

[3] 'High risk of climate-related disaster' means that children were estimated to face at least one extreme climate event a year, including heatwaves, cyclones, flooding, water scarcity, wildfires and crop failure.

Families on low incomes are at greater risk of food insecurity and poverty during times of crisis.

Slums and informal settlements are at particular risk from extreme heat and flooding due to poor quality housing, infrastructure and services.

Girls bear the brunt when families struggle to cope in times of crisis, and are at risk of gender-based violence, for example when forced to travel further for water during drought.

The climate emergency harms all of us in different ways and worsens inequality.

Our different experiences and ideas can contribute to solutions.

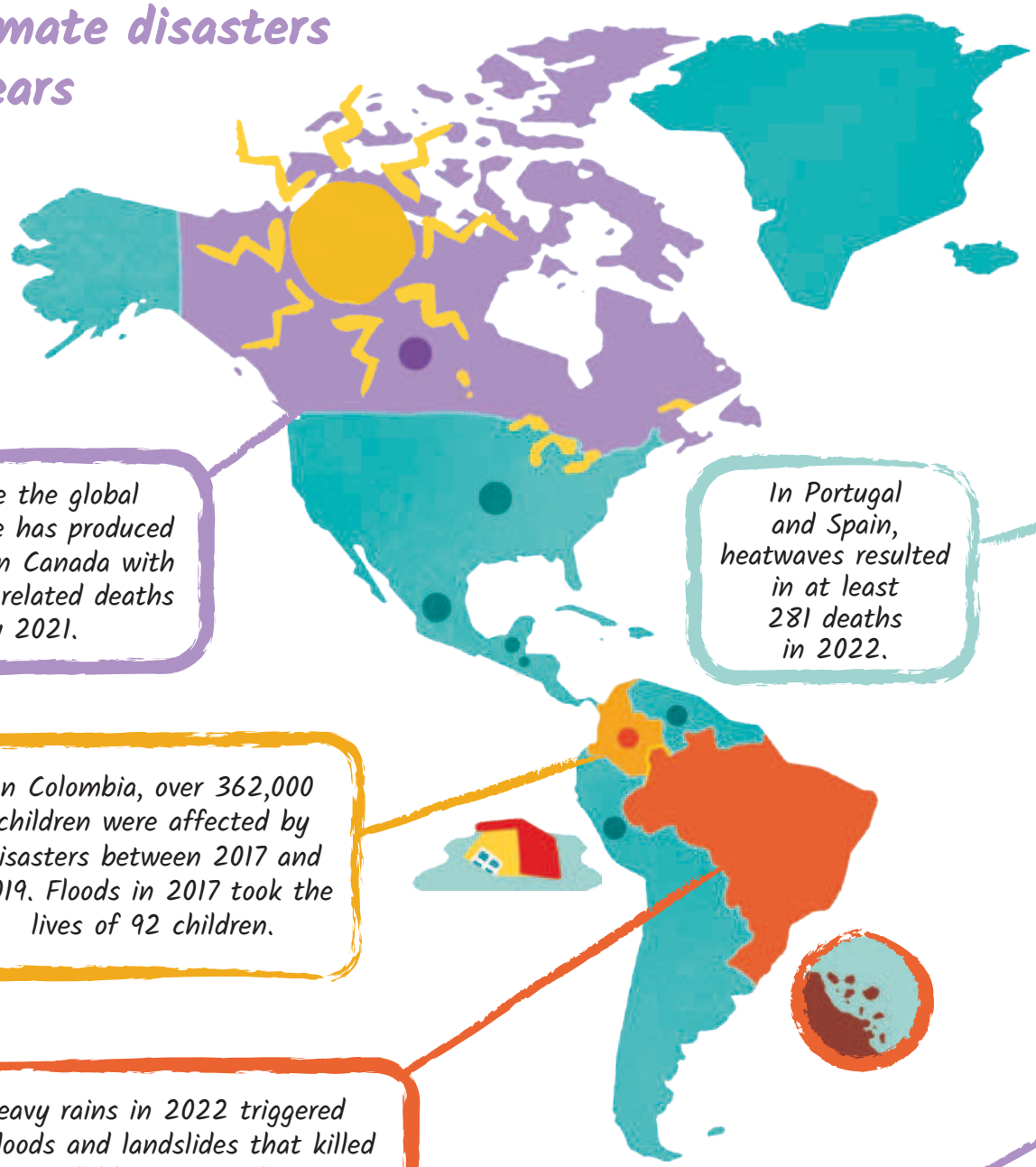
The climate emergency and conflict are displacing people from their homes, exposing them to violence and abuse and disrupting livelihoods, education and access to basic services.

Disasters magnify barriers already faced by children with disabilities, and they are often excluded from climate adaptation and disaster response.

Environmental destruction and colonisation destroys resources and knowledge held by Indigenous Peoples.

The climate emergency is a reality for children across the world

Selected climate disasters in recent years



Warming at twice the global rate, climate change has produced intense heatwaves in Canada with 569 identified heat-related deaths in June-July 2021.

In Portugal and Spain, heatwaves resulted in at least 281 deaths in 2022.

In Colombia, over 362,000 children were affected by disasters between 2017 and 2019. Floods in 2017 took the lives of 92 children.

In Brazil, heavy rains in 2022 triggered catastrophic floods and landslides that killed 14, including seven children in Rio de Janeiro, and displaced at least 25,000 people and killed more than 130 in North East Brazil.

In South Africa, climate change has doubled the likelihood of dangerous flooding. In 2022, flooding in KwaZulu-Natal left more than 400 people dead, and affected 630 schools.

● Countries that children participating in Save the Children's 2022 global listening exercise were from.

In Germany and Belgium, record rain in 2021 triggered devasting floods that caused a reported death toll of 183 in Germany, and 36 in Belgium.
Over 5,700 families have been displaced from their homes by drought in central and southern Iraq, including families previously displaced by conflict.
In Afghanistan, nearly 19 million children and adults are facing severe food shortages due to combined crises of drought, conflict and Covid-19. Children are frequently going to bed hungry, with girls reporting this almost twice as much as boys.
Cylcone Seroja in 2021 caused historic flooding and landslides that left 181 dead in Indonesia, 42 in Timor Leste and one in Australia.
Over 1,300 lives were lost in unprecedented flooding in Pakistan in 2022, with children making up a third of total fatalities. 33 million people, including 11 million children, have been severely affected.
In Mozambique, Cyclone Idai and Kenneth in 2019 left close to 2.5 million people, including 1.3 million children, vulnerable and in need of humanitarian assistance.
In Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia, droughts in 2022 have left more than 6.4 million people in need of food support. Droughts have been linked to a doubling in child marriages, the risk of school dropout tripling within three months, and has left more than 1.8 million children in need of treatment for life-threatening malnutrition.

A wake-up call for change

For many people right now, especially children, life is becoming more difficult and more dangerous. This is because they face several crises at once: the climate emergency, inequality, Covid-19, devastating, long-running conflicts, and the rising cost of food and other essentials.[4]

Covid-19 has increased poverty. The climate emergency is creating food shortages – and that started even before the war in Ukraine. Now, the combination of all of these threats is causing food and energy prices to rise quickly. The result is the worst global food crisis in decades. Countries and families all over the world are struggling to afford enough to eat.

The climate and inequality crisis is one of the root causes of the global food and cost of living crises. These kinds of overlapping crises will become more common and more harmful in the future – unless the world acts now to tackle the underlying climate and inequality crisis.

> "It is not fair for any child to go through this harsh economic inequality and drought."
>
> *14-year-old boy, Somalia*

> "My own basic needs are often not met, and I am reluctant to ask my parents because I also know that my family's economic condition is getting worse."
>
> *13-year-old boy, Indonesia*

> "Food is very expensive and my mother can't buy some things."
>
> *10-year-old boy, Spain*

2.4 billion reasons to act

Through school strikes, street protests and social media, children and youth movements have been bringing attention to the climate emergency. 35% of the children who took our survey on climate and inequality told us they were already taking action to tackle climate change and inequality or wanted to start.

Children are experts on what's happening in their own lives and communities, and know what they need. Most children want to see change. The world needs to come together to make it happen, by listening to the calls that children are making and learning from their activism. All adults have a role to play. But it is governments that have particular responsibility for making change happen.

There are 2.4 billion children alive on earth today. That's 2,400,000,000 reasons for adults to take action. Now.

> "We need to work together because we don't live in the same country, but in the same world."
>
> *Boy in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

[4] *2021 Disasters in Numbers* report by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters. Available at https://cred.be/sites/default/files/2021_EMDAT_report.pdf

Five ways to change the world

Most of the children we spoke to around the world believe adults should do more to address the climate and inequality crisis.

Listening to what children are telling us and looking at other research and evidence, Save the Children has identified five key areas where governments, business and organisations should take urgent action.

1 Urgently tackle the climate emergency and inequality together.

This means reducing the polluting gases that are causing the planet to overheat at the same time as reducing poverty. Moving quickly from fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas to renewable energy is essential. For most countries that are developing new energy supplies, solar and wind are now the cheapest sources of power. Investing in these kinds of renewable energy can also create jobs, which can give families income and protect them from poverty.[5]

For many children we spoke to, repairing the damage done to nature, including protecting and planting trees, is a priority. This is also a way of addressing the climate emergency and inequality together, as it can reduce greenhouse gases, create jobs and increase food supplies.

73% of children who took our survey said adults must do more to tackle the climate emergency and inequality.

> "We need trees to plant because they benefit us as crops and produce oxygen that helps us breathe."
>
> *Child in Iraq*

> "It is important for the government to build solar panels to take advantage of natural resources."
>
> *12-year-old girl, Mexico*

A fairness test

Governments and businesses have a lot of power. They also have responsibility – to treat children fairly and consider the impact of their decisions on children's rights.

Governments and businesses should work with children and their communities to develop and apply a fairness test to policies to make sure they are tackling poverty, inequality and the climate emergency for current and future generations. The test must include checking that the government and businesses are doing enough to tackle the climate emergency and making a fair contribution to help meet global targets – like keeping the rise in global temperatures under 1.5°C, including rapidly phasing out fossil fuels.[6]

[5] Based on report by the International Energy Agency, available at: https://www.carbonbrief.org/solar-is-now-cheapest-electricity-in-history-confirms-iea/

[6] To find out why it's crucial to limit global heating to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (before fossil fuels started to be used in factories, for transport and for building), see this Save the Children report: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/_stc_cc_child-friendly_final_220921.pdf/

2 **Invest in children** – to fulfil their rights and build a greener and more just planet.

Investing in the services children need to enjoy their rights to good health, nutrition, education, safety and freedom from poverty can also boost economies. Jobs in teaching and healthcare are often underpaid. Investing in fair pay for this work could increase access to services for children and reduce inequality. What's more, these jobs only create low levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

3 **Deliver justice at the frontlines of the climate emergency** – by keeping those children safe who are most affected by the climate and inequality crisis.

Governments and other organisations need to plan better for potential disasters and adapt farming, schools and other essential services so they are not disrupted by changes in the climate and disasters. When disasters do happen, governments and organisations need to provide better support. This is important for keeping children and families safe, helping them recover as quickly as possible, and covering costs and losses.

4 **Listen to children and act on their demands.**

All children have a right to be listened to and participate in decisions that affect their lives. Governments must make sure children have a meaningful say.

5 **Shift money and power globally** – so that lower income countries and those at most risk from the climate emergency have the money they need to build a greener, fairer future.

The money needed to make these five changes does exist but it must be unlocked to address the climate and inequality crisis (see page 13).

Rich countries and companies that have contributed the most to the climate emergency have a responsibility to do the most to end the climate and inequality crisis and to support less wealthy countries. Many rich countries became wealthy, for example, through slavery, through invading other countries and using their resources, and through creating unfair trade agreements. These historical processes are at the root of many of the inequalities we see today.

> "We do not have electricity in our homes so we can't study at night. Even in our school we don't have it, so we do not learn about computers because they cannot operate without electricity."
>
> *Child in Zambia*

> "The government is not providing alternatives to charcoal burning so that the environment can be spared and improved."
>
> *Child in Malawi*

> "People in charge – the decision-makers – should be the first ones to take care of this. Community leaders, the president, the vice president, the ones with highest levels of authority should take action."
>
> *15-year-old girl, Guatemala*

> "I think the hardest thing is that adults, and especially the older ones, just don't have the same view of reality that we do. They hold all the power – just look at the average age of the people in our government – but when young people... voice their opinion, we are being bullied by adults and especially by men."
>
> *18-year-old young woman, Norway*

Governments support the fossil fuel industry with $11 million every minute.[7]

That money should be used to tackle the climate and inequality crisis instead.

[7] Estimate by the International Monetary Fund. See: https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/climate-change/energy-subsidies%20/

Rich countries must work with less wealthy countries to help to unlock funds, including by:

1. **Making lending from rich countries to lower income countries fairer**, so that governments don't have to choose between repaying debt to big companies and richer countries or investing in children's health, education and safety.
2. **Improving global and national tax systems** to stop big companies from avoiding taxes, so that governments can use this money to invest in children and tackle the climate emergency.
3. **Increasing aid money from rich countries to lower income countries** to address the climate and inequality crisis, including increasing the focus on children in climate funding. Richer countries must fulfil promises they have made to share money and power (for example, to spend 0.7% of their yearly income on supporting poorer countries to provide for their people).
4. **Finding ways to make better use of companies' money** to make sure their work supports efforts to reduce inequality and emissions, including thorough assessments and reporting of the impact of their business on children's rights and the environment.

The world's wealthiest 1% of people are responsible for twice the level of emissions of the poorest 50%.

> "In Sámi culture we have always been very aware not to use more resources than necessary... and yet Indigenous people are most affected... Our perspective is that it is not the nature's job to make us rich and earn profits."
>
> *From a discussion between 21–22-year-old Sámi young people in Norway*[8]

> "They colonised us for a reason. We are full of minerals, diamonds and gold. You go to Ghana, Nigeria, Gambia. These are some of the reasons they colonised us."
>
> *Boy in Sierra Leone*

> "Our families and adults lived this life, but we are the ones who will continue living on this earth."
>
> *17-year-old girl who was displaced from Syria and is now living in Türkiye*

> "Ensure the rich are taxed in the same way poorer families have to pay tax. Offer help to pay unaffordable bills and stop companies making huge profits while poorer people go without."
>
> *Child in the UK*

How much will it cost?

The cost of tackling the climate crisis for the seven richest countries in the world is around 2% of their yearly income.[9] That's about the same as what they spend on defence.[10]

For lower income countries, that are home to many more people, the cost is higher. They do not have the money they need to invest in children, technology or green industries – estimated to be about $4.2 trillion a year.[11] That's a lot, but it's less than the $5.9 trillion a year that governments spend globally supporting the fossil fuel industry through direct subsidies and through picking up health and environmental costs.[12]

[8] Sámi are an Indigenous People from an area of land known as Sápmi that includes parts of Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia.

[9] Estimate by the Brookings Institute and London School of Economics – this covers human needs, sustainable infrastructure, steps to adapt to and increase resilience in the face of the climate emergency and to help nature recover.

[10] Calculation from World Bank data on military spending. See: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=GB&name_desc=true

[11] According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

[12] Estimate by the International Monetary Fund. See: https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/climate-change/energy-subsidies%20/

“Hope is a thing that is the beginning of anything.

If you hope to do anything

there is no power that can stop you.”

- Boy aged 14, India

An end to the climate and inequality crisis is possible.

Join Generation Hope.

This summary report contains information, analysis and statistics on the global climate and inequality crisis, and was developed with children for children. It's specially designed to help you:

- **develop your ideas and sharpen your arguments**
- **find out more about what other children and young people around the world think about these crucial issues**
- **campaign for change on the climate and inequality crisis using facts you can share with your community, companies and businesses, or with your local or national government.**

The information in this summary is taken from the full *Generation Hope* report.

Five ways to fight for the future

The climate and inequality crisis must be an urgent wake-up call to rethink the rules that run the world, the economies that power it, and the ways we treat our planet.

To create a greener, fairer future, governments, businesses, organisations and international institutions like the United Nations must:

1. **Urgently tackle the climate emergency and inequality together** by making the most of links between reducing poverty and greenhouse gases, and by checking that policies meet a 'fairness test' that checks that the rights of current and future generations of children are being protected.

2. **Invest in children** for their rights, futures, equality, the economy and the planet.

3. **Deliver justice at the frontlines of the climate and inequality crisis** by keeping the children most affected safe and supported.

4. **Listen to children** and act on their demands.

5. **Shift money and power globally** so that poor countries and those at most risk of climate disasters have the money they need for urgent action to build a greener, fairer future.

Cover illustration: Emily, age 14, Save the Children UK Youth Advisory Board member.

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