

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# GENERATION HOPE

**2.4 billion reasons to end  
the global climate and  
inequality crisis**



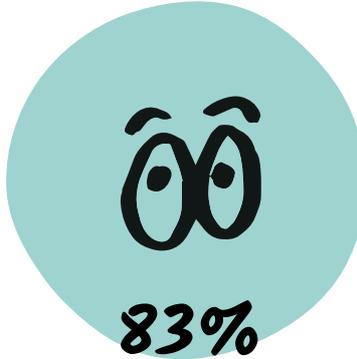
**Save the Children**

# The climate and inequality crisis in numbers

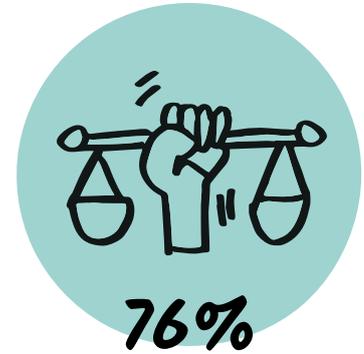
The crisis is having a profound impact on children's rights, especially for children most affected by poverty and discrimination.



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



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



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%.



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.

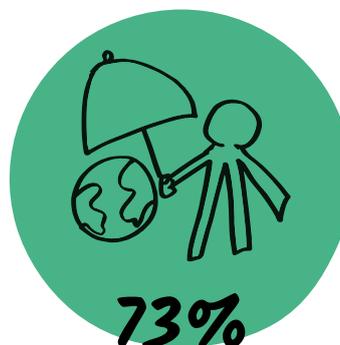
**\$4.2 trillion**

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

*Children are demanding change.*



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

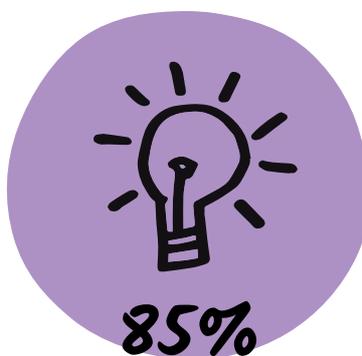


*of children responding to our survey believed adults should be doing more to tackle the issues.*

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



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



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



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



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



*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.*

# Summary

**66** We need to work together because we don't live in the same country, but in the same world. **99**

*Message shared by a boy participating in a Save the Children dialogue in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

**C**limate change is commonly described by policy-makers, business leaders and media as the greatest threat to the future. But when Save the Children recently undertook our biggest-ever dialogue with more than 54,500 children from 41 countries on issues of climate change and inequality, they left us in no doubt that the climate threat isn't about tomorrow. For the world's 2.4 billion children, the climate crisis is a global emergency *today*.

In higher and lower income countries, children are experiencing and observing changes in weather patterns, like successive years of drought, and a rise in extreme weather events like flooding and cyclones. One 15-year-old girl in Colombia summed it up powerfully: **"Climate change is like a monster that destroys us. There are storms, hurricanes, it's very hot, there's a lot of rain. We are not taking care of the planet; we are filling it with garbage."**

## The climate emergency is deeply connected to inequality

Our dialogues with children confirmed that the climate emergency and issues of inequality are deeply connected, and cannot be dealt with in isolation from each other. Across the world, inequalities are deepening the emergency and its impacts on children, most notably across two key dimensions.

**The first dimension of inequality is age.** The climate emergency is a child rights crisis. Children are bearing the brunt of the emergency because they are at a unique stage of physical and emotional development, putting them at greater risk during disasters and times of hardship.<sup>1</sup> As one 16-year-old boy living in Egypt observed, **"Children are more vulnerable than adults, so that the factories that produce smoke harm them."**

## Our dialogue with children on the intersecting climate and inequality crisis

Between May and August 2022, Save the Children staff engaged with more than 54,500 children from 41 countries through in-person consultations, interviews and surveys. Our aim was to listen to children about their experiences of climate change and inequality, and the changes that they want adults to make, in order to shape our own work and campaigning. While dialogues were structured by common guidelines and a set of core questions, colleagues engaged with children in ways that were appropriate to their local context and that supported children in their own activism.

While we did not aim for a scientifically representative sample, the dialogues reached different groups of children in higher and lower income countries in all regions, including children who experience discrimination as a result of sex,

race, disability, migratory status, income level, indigeneity or identity. Some of the children we spoke to had previous engagement with us through our programmes and campaigns, but many had not. Some were experienced campaigners, while others had limited prior knowledge of the issues. Most children we spoke to were aged 8–17, though some young people aged 18–22 participated.

The dialogues brought out rich insights, many of which appear in this report and which have informed our analysis and recommendations. These insights have deepened our understanding of children's experiences and priorities, and of how an international organisation like Save the Children can support the bold child activism that is under way in all corners of the globe.

Children have longer to live with the rising impacts of global heating and climatic changes. Previous research in *Save the Children's Born Into the Climate Crisis* report found a child born in 2020 will experience on average nearly seven times more heatwaves in their lifetime compared with a person born in 1960, and nearly three times the exposure to crop failure.<sup>2</sup>

**The second dimension of inequality is in income, wealth and power.** Children in our dialogues observed that communities and households most affected by poverty, inequality and discrimination have the least protection and, when disaster hits, have less to spend on recovery. One 13-year-old boy in Gaza told us, **“Not all people are financially equal, not everyone has the privilege to be able to live in a safe home and those people are facing a greater danger.”** This is a grave injustice. Children who have done the least to cause the climate emergency – or design unequal economic systems – are suffering the most from their impacts.

Inequalities in income, wealth and power are often intertwined with social inequalities and discrimination by race, disability, indigeneity, displacement or migration status and sexual orientations, gender identities, expression and sexual characteristics. A number of children shared insights about how communities affected by inequality and discrimination

have limited political influence to push for policies or changes in government and business practice that would better protect them and the planet.<sup>3</sup> Indigenous People's communities and those facing racial discrimination were noted to be particularly marginalised. As one young woman from the Indigenous Sámi community in Norway shared with us, **“We meet a lot of resistance in pretty much everything we do or say.”**

By contrast, those who are profiting from industries that harm the environment often have more power to influence public spending, regulation and opinions in ways that undermine prospects for stronger climate, environmental and social policies. One simple plea by a 15-year-old boy in Sierra Leone speaks volumes: **“I want leaders to stop taking bribes.”**

The power dynamic at play here between climate change and inequality creates a vicious cycle. Children who already face hardship are pushed deeper into poverty and marginalisation. At the same time, incentives for changes in government and business policy and practice that would address the crisis are undermined. To turn the tide on the climate emergency, as a world we must recognise and understand its connections with inequality – and address the two issues together.

## A note on terminology

We use 'climate emergency' here, recognising – like many children, scientists and administrations – that the threat to humanity from the climate crisis necessitates urgent action.

We use 'inequality' to refer to inequalities in wealth, income and power. We recognise that these often translate into inequalities in opportunities and rights, and are often linked to discrimination by sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, and to social inequalities in race, disability, indigeneity and displacement or migration status. Many children experience intersecting and compounding forms of discrimination and marginalisation.

As we show in the *Generation Hope* report, the global climate emergency is deeply linked to longstanding inequalities in power and wealth

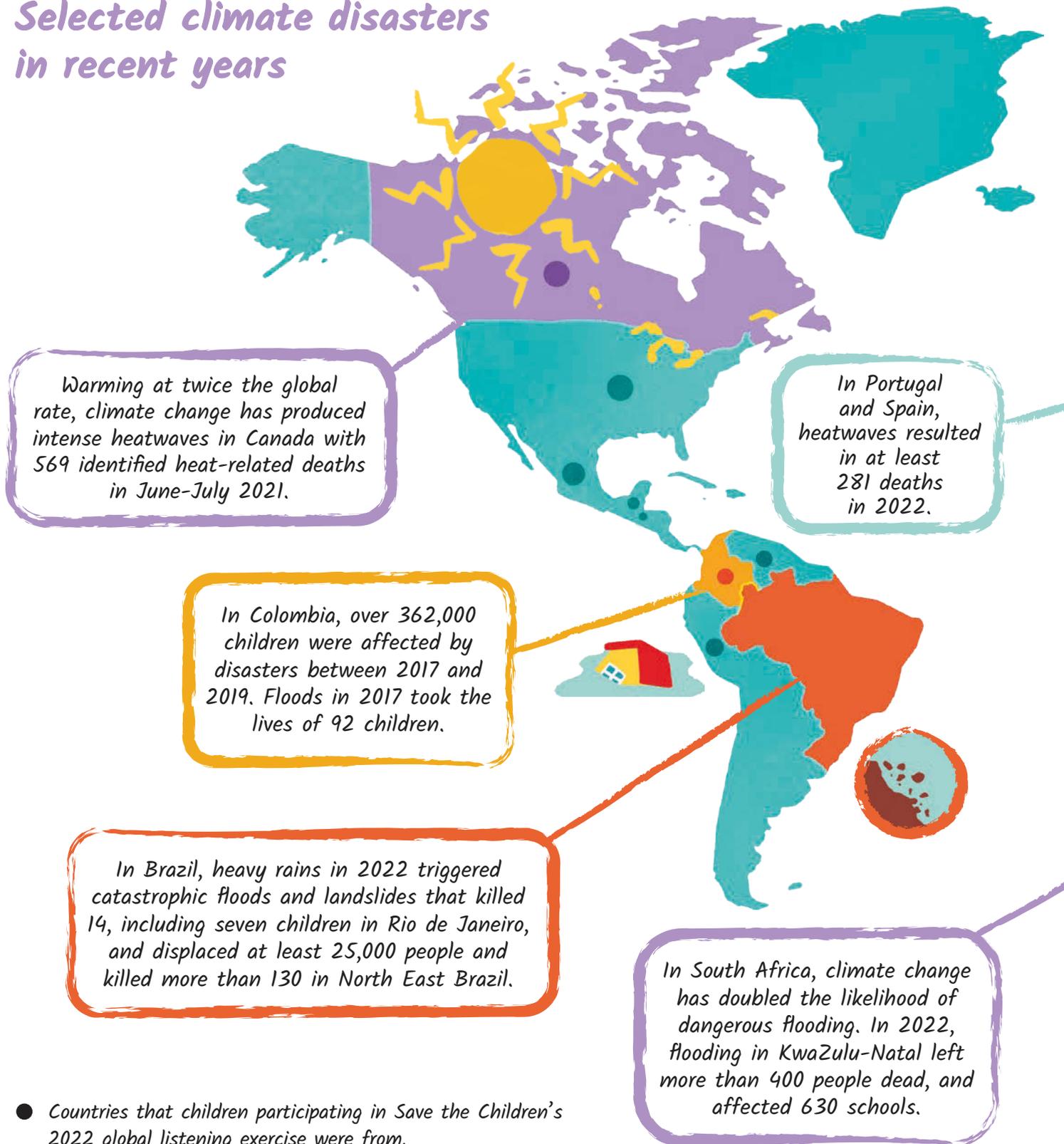
between and within countries and across the world. This has culminated in a climate and inequality crisis, which is disproportionately affecting children.

Throughout the *Generation Hope* report, we refer to the need for action to build a 'green and just' planet. We use these words to represent what children have told us about the kind of world they want to live in. A world where nature is restored, where the impact of disasters is reduced, and where everyone has clean air to breathe and clean water to drink and to wash or play in. 'Green and just' recognises that those who have contributed most to the climate and inequality crisis – and who have benefitted most from it – have the greatest responsibility to address it.

# The climate emergency is a reality

## for children across the world

### Selected climate disasters in recent years



In Germany and Belgium, record rain in 2021 triggered devastating 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.

Cyclone 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.



## The numbers of children affected are staggering

New data analysis by Save the Children – presented for the first time in this report – shows that **774 million children around the world are both living in multidimensional poverty and exposed to high climate risk.**<sup>4</sup>

Most children facing the dual threat of poverty and high climate risk live in lower income countries, with more than three-quarters living in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. A significant number – 121 million children – live in higher income countries, including 28 million children in the world’s most affluent countries.<sup>5</sup> Across the globe, 183 million face the triple threat of high climate risk, poverty and conflict.

Of the more than 42,000 children who responded to surveys that we ran in 15 countries, **83% reported that they had noticed the impact of climate change and/or economic inequality in the world around them.**<sup>6</sup>

The implications of multiple, overlapping risks are starkly illustrated by the current global food, nutrition

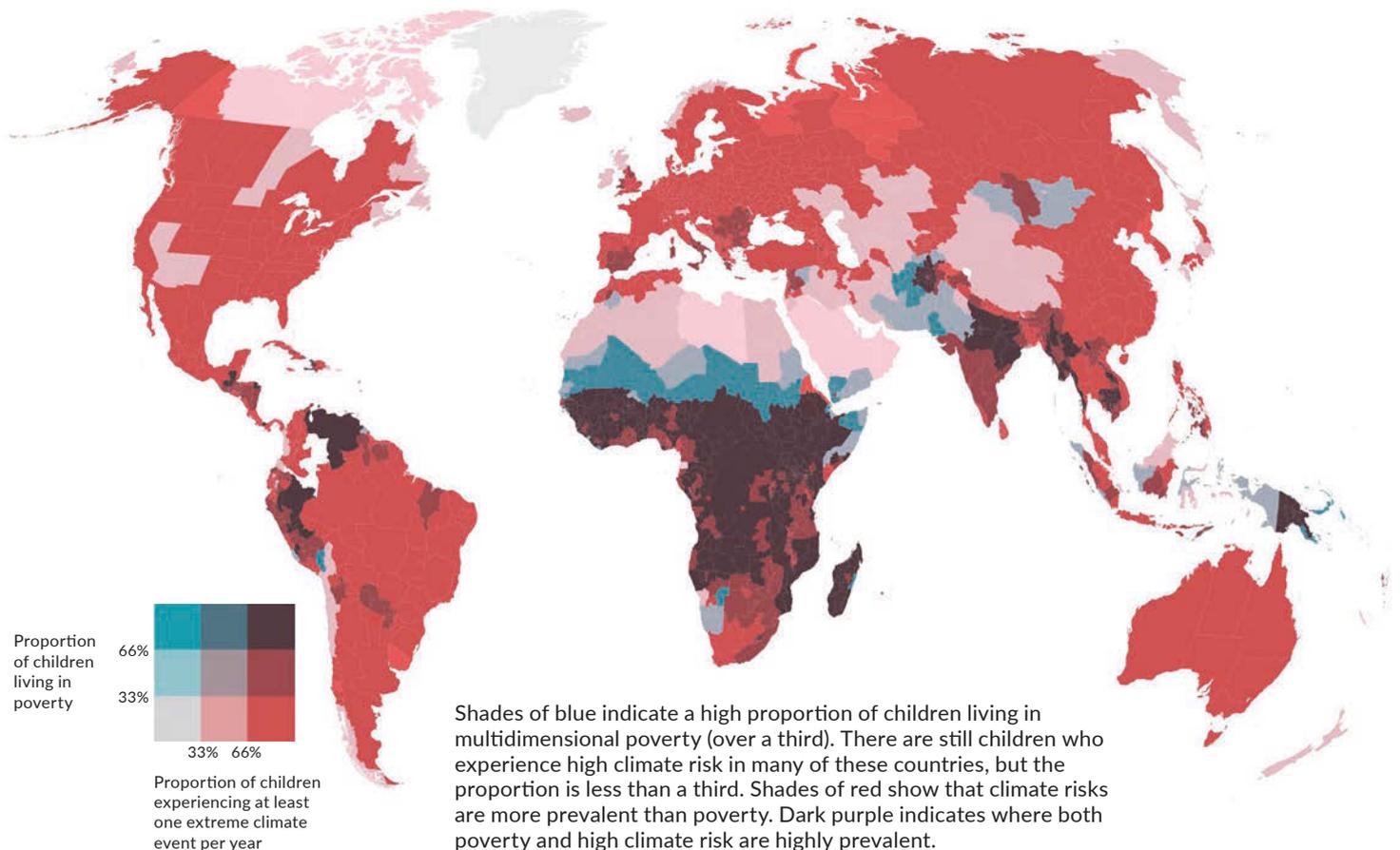
and cost of living crisis that is causing 345 million people in 82 countries to face severe lack of food.<sup>7</sup> In the Horn of Africa alone it is taking a life every 48 seconds. Even in the world’s most affluent countries, many families are struggling to put food on the table.

For example, in all regions, children in our dialogues noted rising food prices and the impact this is having. The insights they shared are heart-breaking:

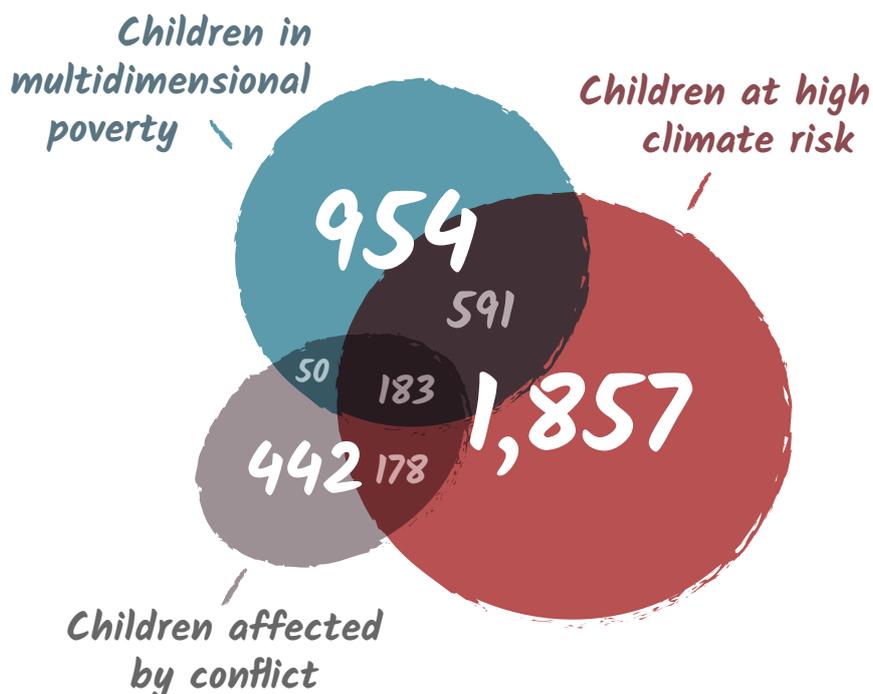
- **“My own basic needs are often not met, and I am reluctant to ask my parents because I also know that my family’s economic condition is getting worse.”** (13-year-old boy in Indonesia)
- **“Food is very expensive and my mother can’t buy some things.”** (10-year-old boy in Spain)
- **“The prices of things keep going up. How are we supposed to sustain ourselves and our families if they keep raising the prices?”** (18-year-old in Zambia)

The immediate cause of spiralling food and living costs is the conflict in Ukraine, coming on top of economic turbulence caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. But the global food, nutrition and cost of living crisis has deeper roots in climatic changes and wider conflict.

**Figure 1: Where do children affected by multidimensional poverty and high climate risk live?**



**Figure 2: How multidimensional poverty, the climate emergency and conflict risk intersect globally (millions of children affected)**



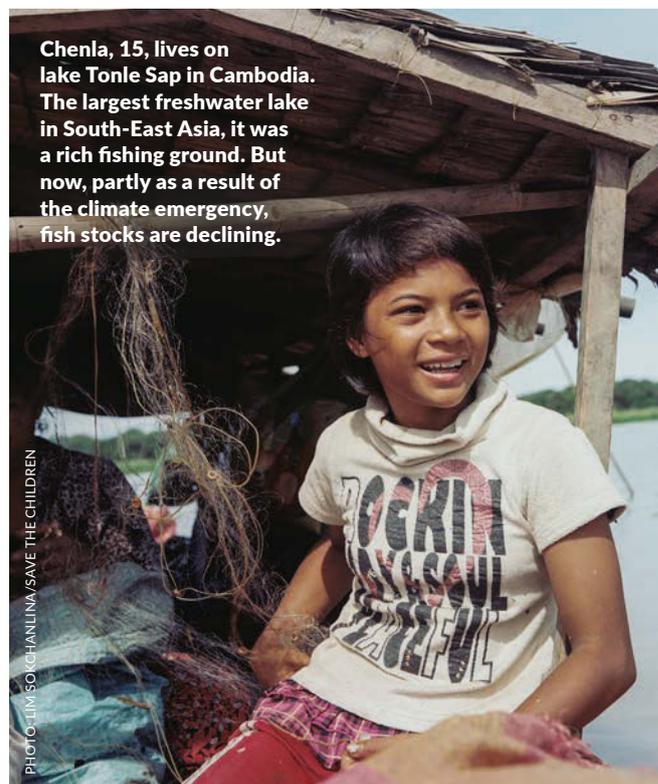
The combined climate and inequality crisis is a risk multiplier, eroding children’s and communities’ resilience to shocks. If it is not addressed with urgency, the frequency and severity of humanitarian and cost of living crises like those we are seeing today are set to increase. Children in disadvantaged communities will pay the price. The fulfilment of children’s rights and achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are slipping further out of reach.

### Children are not passive victims

Children are bearing the brunt of the climate and inequality crisis, but their views, actions and demands for change are among the boldest and most tenacious. In recent years, children’s and young people’s movements have helped to push the climate emergency up the political agenda. **Over 70% of children who responded to our survey believed that adults should be doing more to address the issues, and 35% reported they were already campaigning themselves on the climate crisis or inequality, or wanted to start.** But many feel they are being ignored. As one 12-year-old boy in Nigeria said, **“We try to tell adults things about us and how the community is affecting us, but they don’t listen to us because we are small.”**

Children have insightful ideas for what needs to be done to address the crisis, based on their experiences and unique understanding of how children are being

affected and therefore what should be done. As a 15-year-old girl in Guatemala told us, **“Giving young people a voice and platform to speak from would be the most useful thing; they already have the ideas.”** Many of the children we engaged with are frustrated at a perceived lack of action by governments, business and adults in



**Chenla, 15, lives on lake Tonle Sap in Cambodia. The largest freshwater lake in South-East Asia, it was a rich fishing ground. But now, partly as a result of the climate emergency, fish stocks are declining.**

PHOTO: LIM SOU CHANLINA/SAVE THE CHILDREN

their communities, and a number shared with us the impact that this has had on their mental health or that of their peers. **“The only thing I can think about is fear,”** said a 17-year-old boy in Italy.

But despite this, most children in our dialogues were firm in their belief that change is possible. This gives us hope. And it inspires us to translate hope into concrete action for a greener and more just planet. All adults have a responsibility to listen to and act on the demands children are making. States, in particular, must fulfil their responsibilities under the international human and children’s rights frameworks, including the responsibility to take into account as a primary consideration the impacts on children of decisions that affect them. Businesses must also fulfil their responsibility to respect and support children’s rights. These responsibilities have been neglected for decades. The world would look very different today had they not been.

Delivering change will not always be straightforward. It will require grappling with complexity, navigating trade-offs and making the difficult decisions needed to rewire our economic and social systems – by rewriting the rules and incentives that structure them.<sup>8</sup> As children highlighted in our dialogues, this is a challenge that must be addressed through partnership – across sectors and geographies; between governments, civil society and business; and crucially, with children and their communities. As one child in India put it, **“Unity is the greatest strength of all, so we need to stand together in this fight.”**

## Driving systemic change: five key entry points

The exact changes that are needed in policy and practice will vary according to context and must be defined in line with the responsibilities of states and business under the international human and children’s rights frameworks, which includes consulting with children and taking their best interests into account. However, five key entry points to addressing the combined climate and inequality crisis have particular potential for driving systemic change. We have identified these by drawing on the ideas that children shared with us through our dialogues, together with experience from

our programmes work, wider research and examples of innovative action already being taken in communities across the world. The five entry points are:

- 1 **Double down on climate and inequality** through a unified approach. This must maximise potential synergies while at the same time reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and transitioning from fossil fuels at the pace required to limit global heating to 1.5°C.
- 2 **Invest in children** and their rights to health, nutrition, education, and protection from violence and poverty. This is a precondition for healthy economies and societies.
- 3 **Deliver justice at the climate and inequality frontlines to children and communities most affected** – through anticipating shocks and building resilience to them, adapting essential services to minimise disruption, and supporting children experiencing losses and damage as a result of the climate emergency.
- 4 **Listen to children** and act on their demands, ensuring they have meaningful say over decisions that affect their lives and the planet.
- 5 **Shift finance and power globally**, so that lower income and climate-vulnerable countries that have done the least to contribute to the global climate emergency have the finance they need to deliver on the key entry points listed above and have meaningful influence over the rules that govern the global financing system.

The scale, complexity and urgency of the climate and inequality crisis could lead to a sense of apathy and despair. We cannot allow that to happen. Instead, drawing inspiration from children’s demand for change, adults must maintain a sense of hope and belief in a greener and more just world. And then use this to drive action, putting our unlimited human capacity for creativity and collaboration to work to end the crisis and push for the protection and fulfilment of children’s rights. **“I think you can still take action, you can save it, but it is now or never,”** said one girl participating in a Latin America regional dialogue. We must listen and stand in solidarity with children; 2.4 billion reasons for urgent change.



**66** We are seeing and living  
the climate crisis. **99**

*Amina, 17, climate change activist  
in Somalia*

"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.



## References

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, *The climate crisis is a child rights crisis* UNICEF, 2021a; Child Rights Now!, *The Global Climate Crisis: A Child Rights Crisis*, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/WorldVisionInputs2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Estimates based on the original emissions reduction pledges under the 2015 Paris Agreement. See Save the Children, *Born into the Climate Crisis: Why we must act now to secure children's rights*, Save the Children International, 2021

<sup>3</sup> See also F Green and N Healy, 'How Inequality Fuels Climate Change: The Climate Case for a Green New Deal,' *One Earth* 5, no. 6 (2022): 635-49; H P Lankes, E Soubeyran and N Stern, *Acting on climate and poverty: if we fail on one, we fail on the other*, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy, 2022; T Achiume and UN Human Rights Council. Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, *Global extractivism and racial equality: report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*, UN Digital Library, 2019 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3823039?ln=en>; A Kapoor, N Youssef and S Hood, *Confronting injustice: Racism and the environmental emergency*, Greenpeace and Runnymede Trust, 2022

<sup>4</sup> More information can be found in the full methodology note at <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/children-experiencing-climate-risk-poverty-and-conflict/>. Summary methodology: **Climate:** Children exposed to high climate risk are those who are estimated to experience at least one extreme climate event per year (wildfires, crop failures, droughts, river floods, heatwaves, and tropical cyclones). This is based on an analysis by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel for Save the Children, using the largest multi-model climate impact projections database available to date as part of the Inter-Sectoral Impact Model Intercomparison Project phase 2b (ISIMIP2b). **Poverty:** For 75 low- and middle-income countries this is based on subnational survey data calculated by UNICEF and Save the Children, with children classed as living in poverty if they are deprived of at least one of health, nutrition, education, housing, water or sanitation. For 31 low- and middle-income countries and 8 high-income countries, this is based on estimates of multidimensional poverty using a regression model,

using monetary poverty data by the World Bank and other explanatory variables. For 24 European countries, data is based on Eurostat measures of risk of poverty and social exclusion. For a small number of additional countries, country-specific poverty data has been used. **Poverty and climate overlap:** To estimate the children affected by at least one extreme climate event and living in poverty, we estimated the proportion of climate-affected children and poor children in 1,925 subnational regions, and calculated the overlap. We hereby assume that poverty is equally distributed within those regions, likely leading to an underestimate given that poorer households often live in more risk-prone areas.

<sup>5</sup> In this report, we refer to low- and lower-middle-income countries as lower income, and high- and upper-middle-income countries as higher income. The breakdown of number of children affected by poverty and high climate risk in each of these categories is: low-income: 197 million; lower-middle income: 456m; upper-middle-income: 93m; high-income: 28m.

<sup>6</sup> The survey was run in 15 countries (Albania, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, Colombia, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Nepal, occupied Palestinian territory, the Philippines, South Korea and the UK). Most surveys did not aim to reach a sample representative of the population, and sample sizes varied, from 33 in Kenya to 20,128 in Indonesia. The summary statistics are therefore illustrative rather than scientific, calculated as an average across all participants. The total number of survey respondents aged 8–22 was 42,213. The number of survey respondents varied per question as not all questions were asked in all country surveys, and some questions had higher non-response rates than others.

<sup>7</sup> World Food Programme, 'Global food crisis' (webpage) <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/global-food-crisis>

<sup>8</sup> R Bregman, 'The neoliberal era is ending. What comes next?', *The Correspondent*, 12 May 2020 <https://thecorrespondent.com/466/the-neoliberal-era-is-ending-what-comes-next/>; M Mazzucato, 'A New Global Economic Consensus', Project Syndicate, 13 October 2021 <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/cornwall-consensus-rebuilding-global-governance-by-mariana-mazzucato-2021-10>

Cover photo: Tenneh, aged 13, paddles a canoe to school in Pujehun district, Sierra Leone. (Photo: Jonathan Hyams/Save the Children)

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