



WE NEED TO DO BETTER

**CLIMATE RELATED DISASTERS
AND CHILD PROTECTION IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**IFRC and the Global Child
Protection Area of Responsibility**



This analysis report has been developed through a partnership between the Child Protection Area of Responsibility and the IFRC.

We thank the over 30,000 children and youth from across Southeast Asia who took time and shared their thoughts and experiences. Their perspectives are the primary basis of this analysis report.

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Terminology

Access to education are actions that enhance children's ability to attain education, such as the (re) construction or renovation of education facilities or of water and sanitation facilities; the distribution of education supplies or of meals and food in education facilities; education-related cash programming; the provision of psychosocial support; the provision of safe transportation services from, to or around education facilities; and the tracing of education-related documents.¹

Adolescent are children who are between the ages of 10-19 years.²

Anticipatory action is a set of actions taken to prevent or mitigate potential disaster impacts before a shock or before acute impacts are felt. The actions are carried out in anticipation of a hazard impact and based on a prediction of how the event will unfold. Anticipatory actions should not be a substitute for longer-term investment in risk reduction and should aim to strengthen people's capacity to manage risks.³

Best Interests of the Child is a foundational principle to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It means that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. This principle should guide the design, monitoring and adjustment of all humanitarian programmes and interventions.⁴

Children are a human beings below the age of 18 years.⁵

Child abuse refers to a deliberate act with actual or potential negative impacts upon the child's safety, well-being, dignity, and development. It is an intentional act that takes place in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.⁶

- **Emotional or psychological abuse** is when a caregiver acts or behaves in ways that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child. Such acts include restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection, and other nonphysical forms of hostile treatment that deny the child an appropriate and supportive environment in which to thrive. They are acts that may result in psychological and social deficits in the growth of a child.
- **Physical abuse** is a caregiver's use of physical force to cause actual or possible physical injury or suffering.
- **Sexual abuse** is when a caregiver involves a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society.

Child exploitation refers to when an individual in a position of power and / or trust takes or attempts to take advantage of a child for their own personal benefit, advantage, gratification, or profit. This personal benefit may take different forms: physical, sexual, financial, material, social, military, or political. Exploitation may involve remuneration in cash or in kind (such as social status, political power, documentation, freedom of movement, or access to opportunities, goods, or services) to the child or to a third person/s.⁷

¹ IFRC. (2019). *Strategic Framework on Education*.

² IFRC. (2013). *Youth Engagement Strategy*. [IFRC-YES_Adopted-by-the-GA-2013_EN.pdf \(volunteeringredcross.org\)](#).

³ IFRC Anticipation Hub. (2020). *Anticipation Hub*. [ANTICIPATION HUB - Forecast-based Financing \(forecast-based-financing.org\)](#).

⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2012). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 edition). <https://alliancecpa.org/en/cpms>.

⁵ UN. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Article 1. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

⁶ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2018). *Discussion Paper on the Review of Existing Definitions and Explanations of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation, and Violence against Children*. <https://www.alliancecpa.org/en/child-protection-online-library/discussion-paper-review-existing-definitions-and-explanations-abuse>.

⁷ *Idem*.

Child exploitation may be divided into three categories, namely:

- Economic exploitation – slavery and slave-like practices, servitude, bonded or indentured labour.
- Harmful or hazardous labour – work that, by virtue of the child’s age or the nature of the work, is prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare, among other things the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. This includes the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and children's association with armed forces and armed groups.
- Sexual exploitation – child prostitution, the trafficking or sale of children for sexual purposes (including forced marriage), child pornography and grooming for sexual purposes – including online.⁸

Child participation refers to the manifestation of the right of every child to express their view, to have that view given all due consideration, to influence decision-making and to achieve change. It is the informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalised and those of different ages, genders, and disabilities, in any matter concerning them.⁹

Child protection is the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children.¹⁰

Climate change means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.¹¹

Disaster refers to a serious disruption of the functioning of a community that exceeds its capacity to cope using its own resources. There are many potential causes of such disruption, including natural and technological hazards, industrial accidents, mass movements of populations and infectious and contagious diseases, as well as various factors that influence the exposure and vulnerability of communities.¹²

Disaster preparedness and response activities is an umbrella term for any facilities, services, processes, distributions, resources, training, education, or information that are conducted or provided for the purpose of preparing for and/or responding to disaster.¹³

Violence against children means all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, as listed in article 19, paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁴ It encompasses all acts that involve the intentional use of power or verbal or physical force, threatened or actual, against a child or against a group of children that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child or children’s health, survival, development, or dignity. Possible forms of harm include injury; death; disability; decreased psychological, psychosocial, or mental health; or maldevelopment.

⁸ *Idem*.

⁹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2012). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 edition). <https://alliancecpa.org/en/cpms>.

¹⁰ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2012). *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019 edition). <https://alliancecpa.org/en/cpms>.

¹¹ UN. (1992). *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf.

¹² IFRC. (2019). *Disaster Risk Management Policy: From Prevention to Response and Recovery*. https://oldmedia.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/DRM_policy_Final_EN.pdf

¹³ UNDRR. (2017). *Terminology*. <https://www.undrr.org/terminology>.

¹⁴ UN. Committee on the Rights of the Child. General comment No. 13. (2011). The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence. CRC/C/GC/13. 18 April 2011.

This analysis report, “We Need To Do Better: Climate Related Disasters and Child Protection in Southeast Asia” is a partnership between the Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility and the IFRC. It aims to enhance the protection of children in climate related disasters. In particular, the analysis seeks to understand child perspectives about climate change, climate related disasters, and the risks they face. It provides practical ways to enhance coordinated and localized child protection approaches in preparing for climate related disasters in Southeast Asia.

The analysis is centered around an online survey with 33,033 children and young respondents aged 10-25. In addition, 55 adult stakeholders from UNICEF, Red Cross National Societies, governments, and local and international non-governmental organizations were interviewed. Moreover, the analysis report draws on existing climate change, disaster preparedness, and child protection research from across the region.



Key takeaways

Southeast Asia is a region highly vulnerable to climate change related disasters. It has a large population of children who have existing risks to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.



Past disasters in the region and existing research suggest that climate related disasters are a threat multiplier elevating the potential risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children and mental health concerns. It also enhances disparities around access to education.



Climate change has a disproportionate impact on children who are already marginalized such as those who work, are out of school, on the streets, are migrants or refugees, have a disability, or are Indigenous or LGBTQI+. Girls are at particular risk to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation and face barriers in accessing education because of gender-based inequalities.



Despite progress and the development of disaster and climate sensitive legal frameworks, countries in the region lack comprehensive laws, policies, and regulations for child protection.



Local coordination between government, non-governmental organizations, Red Cross, and United Nations agencies needs to be strengthened, at all levels, to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation against children in climate related disasters.

The humanitarian response to child protection is coming too late. Earlier action within disaster risk reduction and preparedness, especially anticipatory actions, are needed so that the impact on protection is reduced once a disaster does occur.





Children participating in this analysis report highlighted a number of issues:

- Climate related disasters are overwhelmingly on their mind and they are deeply concerned
- Many have already experienced climate related disasters
- They believe that climate related disasters influence the risk of physical and mental abuse against children

- Many children do not know where to access help in case they are threatened or hurt by someone
- Most children want to be involved in local solutions and many feel they do have opportunities to participate, to some degree in decisions that will affect them. Although barriers include hesitation from adults, a lack of roles in leadership, and not knowing where to access opportunities.
- They underline the need to be better prepared. In particular, they want to learn more through schools on actions they can take including developing plans to remain safe in case of climate related disasters, learn where to get help and how to help others, and participate in decision-making that affect their physical and mental well-being.



This study proposes a series of practical actions to improve actions to protect children in climate change disasters. In particular:

- 
1. Recognize the impact of climate change related disasters on children
 - Mandate the collection and analysis of age-, gender- and disability-disaggregated data on children's needs and vulnerabilities.
 - Ensure girls and children with particular risks are prioritized and included in protection programming.
- 
2. Prioritize child participation
 - In all assessments, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation regarding climate change related disasters, ensure children of diverse ages, genders, abilities, and backgrounds have meaningful opportunities to participate.
 - Develop safe spaces where children, especially adolescents, can discuss their concerns and ideas to stay safe during climate related disasters.
- 
3. Improve access to support services and education
 - Ensure that child protection and education services are functional and available to all children. Draw inspiration, as appropriate, from the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Settings.¹⁵
 - Co-design with children and make widely available child-friendly information on where and how to access local support for child protection, MHPSS, and SGBV.
- 
4. Develop, implement, and enforce laws, policies, and regulations
 - Include child protection in all relevant laws, regulations, and policies, notably on climate adaptation and disaster related laws, policies, and regulations.
- 
5. Strengthen local coordination
 - Ensure multi-level coordination between national authorities and local actors, in particular local authorities, child and youth-led and community-based organizations, such as women-led organizations, faith-based networks, local NGOs, UN agencies, and Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies.
 - Train local disaster responders on child protection.
- 
6. Include child protection within anticipatory action for climate related disasters
 - Invest in and Include child protection within preparedness and anticipatory action for climate change related disasters.

¹⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019).



Methodology

Methodology of the Survey

From 12 May until 1 June 2021, children and young people aged between 10 and 25 living in Southeast Asia were invited to participate in an online survey to share their perceptions and recommendations to help us improve the way we address child protection and disasters related to climate change.

The survey consisted of 31 questions and was offered in English, Bahasa, Burmese, Filipino, Khmer, Lao, Malay, Mandarin, Thai, Tetum, and Visayan.

A total of 33,033 responses were compiled, most of which were from the Philippines and Vietnam (88%). The high respondent percentage from these two countries alone brings notable limitations regarding representation of the findings. The information analysed is indicative of the opinions of the children who were able to connect online and fill out their responses as no face-to-face consultations could take place.

An examination of the data was explored through a bivariate analysis of key demographic variables (gender, age, education attainment, urbanicity and minority identity) alongside research questions of interest from the perception survey in STATA. The most significant correlations are included in the below report, but constraints of analyst time available meant a more detailed statistical analysis was not feasible in the time frame. The raw data has been cleaned and anonymized, and is available for further analysis as needed.

The quotes disseminated throughout this publication have been gathered from the survey. Nuances in the meaning could have been lost in translation.



Comments in *blue italics* are from adolescents who participated in this study. Their names and locations have not been identified.

Demographics

Most respondents were from the Philippines (21,526), followed by Vietnam (7,647), Malaysia (1,128), Indonesia (328), Cambodia (170), Laos (94), Timor-Leste (87), Thailand (49), Myanmar (22), Singapore (19) and Brunei (6).

This analysis report uses the term “children” to describe the respondents given children aged 12-17 made up 81% (24,991) of the respondents and the remaining were youth up to the age of 24. 16-year-olds were the most frequent age group filling out the survey. This is likely influenced by the fact that children and youth often have increased access to mobile devices as they grow older, as well as individual agency, and the wish to contribute and make their voices heard. This could also have been influenced by the dissemination methodology, with local and international organizations frequently targeting this audience through their programming and communication, as well as by the algorithms influencing the selection of the target groups on the various social media platforms.

62% of the child respondents identified as female and 37% as male. This might indicate a stronger interest in the topics by females, who, as will be detailed below, are often at higher risks. It might also be related to the demographics of the participants in the social networks which may have been composed of more females than males.

Combined, 3,165 (17%) of the respondents self-identified as belonging to a non-majority group. Breaking this figure down, there were 2,969 identifying as minority (15%), 118 as refugee (0.6%), and 196 as a member of a general migrant group (1%).

“ I am so happy to have the opportunity to share my ideas on this topic, especially because I am not an expert on climate change or child protection, but I think that it is good for me, and not only for me, for people around the world, to be asked those questions.”

“ We need the strengths, the techniques, and skills to make children safer.”

Climate Change and Climate Related Disaster Trends in the Region

Southeast Asia is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world, accounting for one in every 10 natural disasters during the past 120 year¹⁶. This high frequency is primarily due to the region’s geographic location between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, resulting in tropical cyclones, monsoonal flooding, droughts, and other seasonal hazards. Several tectonic plates also surround the region, leading to significant threats of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis.¹⁷

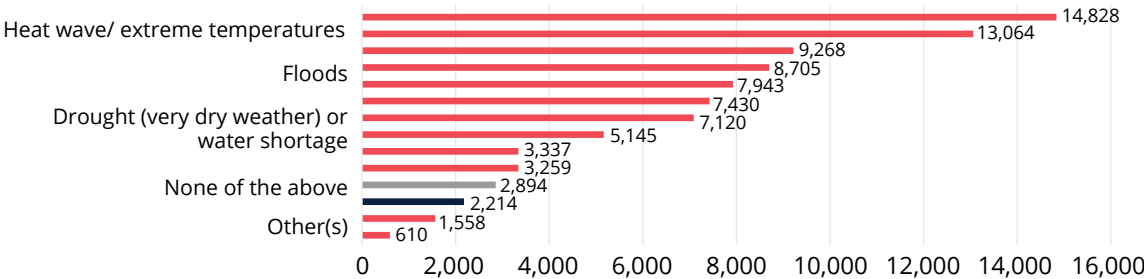
Many ASEAN member States rank among the most vulnerable globally to impacts from climate change. Notably, the region contains six of the world’s 20 most at-risk nations: Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam.¹⁸

Disaster risks include, but are not limited to heat waves, flooding, tropical cyclones, and drought.¹⁹ In 2018 disasters included four out of the ten deadliest events in the world, affected over 13 million people, and killed 6,681 people across Southeast Asia.²⁰

By the end of the century, the region could shift to a “new climate regime”; the coolest summer months would be warmer than the hottest summer months in the period from 1951 to 1980.²¹ Predictions estimate that the expected rise in sea levels will increasingly threaten the 77 percent of Southeast Asians²² who live along the coast or in low lying river deltas. By 2050, daily high tides will flood the areas where over 48 million people in Southeast Asia now live, while predicted average annual flood levels would inundate the homes of over 79 million.²³ At the same time, the direct threats of sea-level rise and superstorms will continue compounding food and water insecurity throughout the region.²⁴

Child participants identified climate-related concerns they had experienced in recent years. Change in weather seasons or patterns, heat waves or extreme temperatures, and storms were the top responses.

Figure 1: Have you experienced any (natural disasters) in your community in recent years?*



* Respondents could select multiple options

90% of children believed that all or some of the natural disasters they have experienced were caused by climate change.

16 Emergency Events Database. (2020).
 17 AHA Centre. (2020). ASEAN Risk Monitor and Disaster Management Review (ARMOR) 2nd edition. <https://ahacentre.org/publication/armor/>.
 18 The ASEAN Secretariat. (2019). ‘ASEAN Cooperation on Environment’.
 19 *Idem*.
 20 Asia-Pacific Disaster Report. (2019). The Disaster Riskscape Across Asia-Pacific: Pathways for Resilience, Inclusion and Empowerment.
 21 Finance & Development, September 2018, Vol. 55, No. 3, Boiling Point, One of the most vulnerable regions to climate change is witnessing the world’s biggest jump in greenhouse gas emissions, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2018/09/southeast-asia-climate-change-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions-prakash.htm>.
 22 <https://www.thegef.org/news/joint-ocean-management-transforms-coasts-south-east-asia>.
 23 *Idem*.
 24 CSIS. (2020). Southeast Asia’s Coming Climate Crisis. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/southeast-asias-coming-climate-crisis>.

“ Climate change is affecting crops, livestock, droughts, floods and nature”

“ It changes the weather patterns, the raining season is really hot and different, there are more floods, people are hit hard.”

“ Here we skip that from the curriculum and children are not allowed to learn from history. Children do not know that they are in this kind of crisis, to me this is the worse part of it: not knowing but facing it in the future.”

“ Reduce the violence in evacuation centres.”

“ We need to take care about the violence endured by children, not just focus on giving them a chance to play.”



Children in the Region

While most countries in Southeast Asia recognize a child as anyone under the age of 18 years, as outlined in United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Brunei, and Vietnam each have lower requirements at 14 years and 16 years respectively.²⁵

The region has a very young population with children representing 12-52% of the population across different countries.²⁶ This accounts for approximately 202 million children, with boys accounting for 51% and girls 49%.²⁷

Children’s Perspectives on Climate Change and Climate Related Disasters

Preoccupation of Children with Climate Change and Climate Related Disasters

Figure 2: How often do you think about climate change?

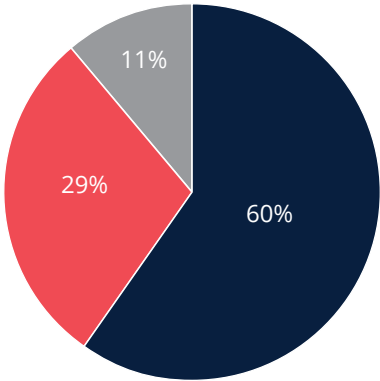
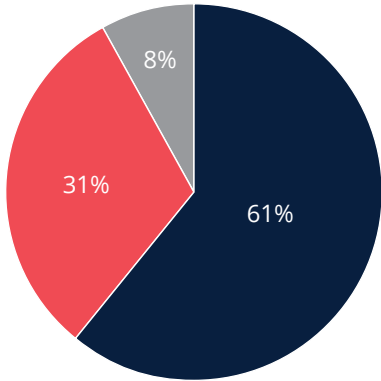


Figure 3: How often do you think about disasters related to climate change?



Never
 Occasionally
 Often

An overwhelming majority of children (about 90%) think about climate change, with about a third of them thinking of these issues often. 92% of children either occasionally or often think about disasters related to climate change. Children tend to think slightly more about the disasters related to climate change than climate change itself.

²⁵ Adapted from UNICEF East Asia & Pacific. (2019). Children in ASEAN. 30 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
²⁶ UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN WOMEN. (2018). Gender Counts: East and Southeast Asia: A Quantitative Assessment of Gender Inequality and its Impact on Girls and Boys. <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/gender-counts-east-and-southeast-asia>
²⁷ Idem.

Children’s Understanding on Climate Change and Climate Related Disasters

Self-assessed levels of relative understanding of climate change and climate related disasters, also around 90%, seem to indicate a correlation between gaining some understanding of these topics and having them in mind.

Figure 4: How would you rate your understanding of climate change?

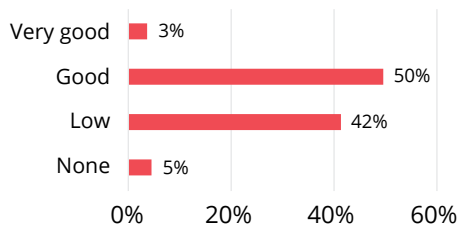
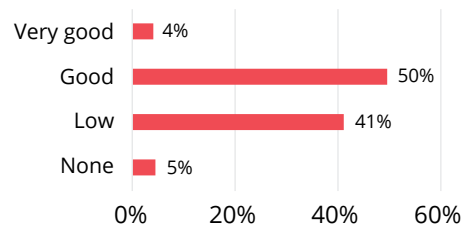


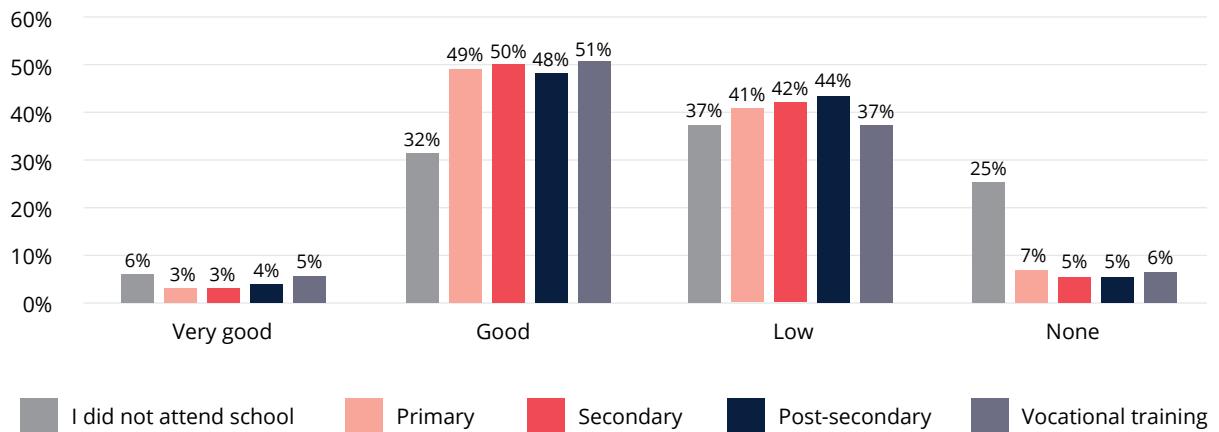
Figure 5: How would you rate your understanding of **disasters** related to climate change?



About half of children considered themselves as having a good understanding of both climate change and climate related disasters, while 41% felt they had some understanding but at a low level. Only 3% felt strong about their understanding. Those indicating no understanding at all represent 5% of children. Similar levels of understanding were shared for children identifying as coming from urban and rural areas.

Both climate change and climate related disasters were understood in equal proportions, suggesting that children may perceive them as strongly correlated.

Figure 6: Understanding of climate change by education completed



A greater share of children and young people who reported not ever attending school declared a lower understanding of climate change. Similarly, a lower share of those who did not attend school stated having a good understanding of climate change. For those reporting having attended schooling at any level, however, the differences in reported understanding were minor, supporting the idea that schools are not the only place to access information and build understanding about this topic.

Figure 7: How would you rate your understanding of climate change? (member of general population)

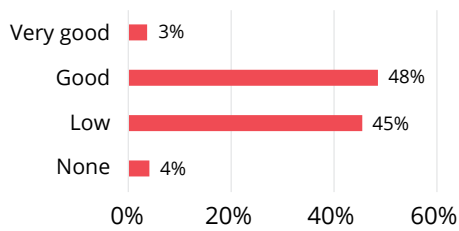
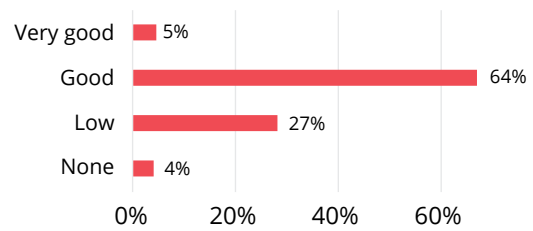


Figure 8: How would you rate your understanding of climate change? (member of minority community)



Children self-identifying as originating from minority groups or belonging to refugee or migrant communities indicated stronger understanding of climate change.

“ Climate change and child protection is a very hot topic. Climate change will affect our lives and our work. Child protection is really the most powerful point that everyone seems not to care too much about in this frame.”

“ I just saw the topics and felt: oh, why climate change and child protection? This topic is different, but then it is not surprising that they must be dealt with together. Climate change actions and child protection are relevant because climate related disasters are happening, they affect children more than men and women. So, it’s time for us to know how to protect the child and take appropriate climate actions.”

Violence, Abuse, and Exploitation of Children

Violence against children is very prevalent in Southeast Asia; the estimated economic burden in East Asia and Pacific is \$209 USD billion per year, equivalent to 2% of the region’s Gross Domestic Product.²⁸

Estimates of the prevalence of violence against children in the region²⁹:

- physical abuse from 10% to 30.3%
- sexual abuse from 1.7% to 11.6%
- emotional abuse from 31.3% to 68.5%
- child labour from 6.5% to 56%

Climate change has a disproportionate impact on marginalized and excluded individuals. Among children, those most disadvantaged face the greatest risks as climate related impacts threaten to overwhelm their fragile or limited support system capacity and further compound inequity.

These children include children living in poverty, children who are working, children who are out of school, homeless and street-based children, children in conflict zones, migrating children, refugee children, stateless children, minorities, Indigenous children, children with disabilities, LGBTQI+ children and children who are married.³⁰

“ Children working in the street, sleeping in the street and those living in the slums are very much at risk of violence, especially with urban disasters, they are not protected.”

28 UNICEF East Asia & Pacific. (2015). Estimating the economic burden of violence against children in East Asia and the Pacific.

29 ASEAN Secretariat. (2016). ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children.

30 ECPAT International. (2017). Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia.

“ The children who remain with their parents are usually in good condition provided they get daily assistance for instance for their food, drinks and health. Those whose parents passed away have no help”

“ For indigenous communities, it is more of a systemic oppression. The violence does not come from the community itself but from external sources, like companies pushing them to relocate.”

“ The Karen, an indigenous group in the North, they are victims, but they are being blamed for causing climate change.”

National Youth Climate Survey in Malaysia

The National Youth Climate Change Survey in Malaysia carried out by UNDP, UNICEF & EcoKnights in 2020 highlighted that the impacts of climate change are not evenly distributed among all youth in the country: Indigenous youth are more likely to have experienced droughts in the last three years compared to non-indigenous youth – the percentage of indigenous youth who have experienced droughts in the last three years was 37.7%, as compared to 21.8% of non-indigenous youth who have experienced the same.

Access to education

More than 100 million children live and study in areas prone to disasters such as earthquakes, floods, typhoons, and fire in Southeast Asia. Between 2009 and 2014, 14'500 schools in Southeast Asia were fully or partially damaged by natural disasters.³¹

The **ASEAN Safe Schools Initiative**, a partnership between the ASEAN Member States and civil society organisations, promotes a comprehensive approach for school safety in the region so that children become more resilient to disasters and have a safe and secure learning environment.³² Examples of activities include student-led risk assessments, school drills for emergency preparedness, comprehensive safety assessments and the development of disaster risk reduction handbooks for schools.³³

Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education sector³⁴

The Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education sector (GADRRRES) aims to ensure that all schools are safe from disaster risks and all learners live in a culture of safety. In support of the Sustainable Development Goals and in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, GADRRRES promotes a comprehensive approach to DRR education through the Comprehensive School Safety Framework. This approach is based on education policy, plans, and programmes that are aligned with disaster management at national, regional, district and local school site levels.

31 Adapted from <https://asean.org/speechandstatement/asean-and-civil-society-launch-safe-schools-initiative/>.

32 ASEAN. (2015). ASEAN Safe Schools Initiative: A Compilation of Case Studies.

33 *Idem*.

34 <https://oldmedia.ifrc.org/ifrc/messages-disaster-prevention/school-safety/>.

Climate change affects a child's ability to learn³⁵, and increases the risk of drop-out³⁶. Studies indicate that an overall reduction in educational attainment, lower academic performance, and higher rates of absenteeism among children who have experienced climate shocks.³⁷ After these events, children may also miss school due to sickness (e.g., malnutrition during drought, or increased rates of diarrheal disease after floods), injury, or displacement. In the long run, this may reduce lifetime earnings when these children reach adulthood.³⁸ As gender, climate change, and education intersect, girls are particularly at risk of being negatively affected.³⁹ The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-school Children and Youth affirms the rights of the most vulnerable groups of children, including those displaced or made more vulnerable as a result of emergencies, including the climate crisis and natural disasters.

Access to education in Cambodia

In Cambodia's Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction, the education sector is highlighted in two of its six components, which have provided a framework for school safety efforts in Cambodia. Subsequently, several activities have been implemented, including: the integration of disaster risk reduction into the school curricula of Grade 8's Earth science and geography subjects, development of school construction guidelines, and issuance of a child-friendly school policy, which promotes child's basic rights, and emphasises child-centred disaster risk reduction and school safety initiatives, including child protection from disasters.⁴⁰

“*The Social Welfare should step in when the parents cannot protect their own children. They should be helped with a social transition or adoption.*”

“*They don't have information where to go.*”

“*Some children still want to go to school but others don't want to go to school anymore.*”

The role of gender

The UNDP Gender Inequality Index⁴¹ shows poor equality for girls and women compared to boys and men across the region.

Girls typically have lower social status than boys, are socialised to be submissive and to see themselves as inferior to men and at their service.⁴² This inequality between sexes puts girls at a significant disadvantage compared to boys. The differing outcomes for girls and boys are likely attributable to social norms which support male dominance, violence, and toughness but limit girls to subservient, domestic, and reproductive roles.⁴³

35 UNICEF. (2019). Are Climate Change Policies Child-sensitive? A Guide for Action: Summary. **Are climate change policies child-sensitive (unicef.org)**.

36 The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, PMNCH Knowledge Summary #32 Protecting women's and children's health from a changing climate, <https://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/summaries/ks32/en/>.

37 Brookings Institute. (2018). *How Natural Disasters Undermine Schooling*. **How natural disasters undermine schooling (brookings.edu)**.

38 *Idem*.

39 Brookings Institute. (2017). *3 Platforms for Girls' Education in Climate Strategies*. **3 platforms for girls' education in climate strategies (brookings.edu)**.

40 ASEAN. (2015).

41 UNDP. (2019). *UNDP Gender Inequality Index 2019*. **Gender Inequality Index (GII) | Human Development Reports (undp.org)**.

42 Patané, G. (2013). "Child Labour and Vulnerability to SEC: Investigating Work and Gender Structures", *ECPAT International Journal* 8 (October 2013): 21, as cited in ECPAT International. (2017).

43 UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN WOMEN. (2018). *Gender Counts: East and Southeast Asia: A Quantitative Assessment of Gender Inequality and its Impact on Girls and Boys*. <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/gender-counts-east-and-southeast-asia>.

In each of the countries in the region there are fewer girls than there are boys. For every 10 boys under the age of 18 years there are only 9 girls. Major contributors to this disparity include gender-biased sex selection before birth and excess mortality among girls under 5 years of age at a regional level. Child marriage remains common in this region⁴⁴ with 10 – 24% of women aged 14-20 married by the time they reach 19.⁴⁵

Girls are more likely to be sexually exploited⁴⁶ and trafficked than boys⁴⁷. Yet, a considerable number of boys are abused⁴⁸ although their vulnerability remains almost invisible, often ignored, or overlooked⁴⁹ and they sometimes are unprotected by legislation.⁵⁰

Available data suggest high rates of physical and/ or sexual intimate partner violence; for instance, with one in five girls affected in Myanmar and one in three in Timor-Leste.

In the region, boys are more likely to be in child labour and hazardous labour. They are also recruited to serve in ethnic armed groups through the use of intimidation, threats, and violence.⁵¹

The inequalities and power differences between boys and girls are reflected in the risk to violence, abuse, and exploitation during disasters. Women and children in Asia are more likely to be killed by disasters than men. SGBV against women and girls, child or early marriage and trafficking are all evidenced to escalate in the aftermath of a disaster, but how these are affected by climate change is less understood.⁵²

The heightened levels of gender-based violence are rooted in the inequalities inherent in the social construction of gender prior to the catastrophe, which then become sharpened as efforts to survive become more urgent.⁵³

For example, following Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, the greater mortality of girls than boys were attributed to limitations in their ability to swim or climb to safety.⁵⁴

Research from Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines also confirms increased fears of child marriage and gender-based violence in the aftermath of disasters. To reduce the burden of feeding many family members after the loss of livelihoods to disasters, young girls are often married off or sold to human traffickers. Such coping mechanisms curtail the girls' education and often seal their fate with regard to the types of lives and livelihoods they can have in future.⁵⁶

“ The traditions are very strict. The girls get the effects more than the boys.”

“ There is a lot of misogyny, as well as taboo on sexual violence.”

44 UNICEF East Asia & Pacific, (2019). Children in ASEAN. 30 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

45 Child Rights Coalition Asia. (2016). Violence against children in Southeast Asia.

46 ECPAT International. (2017).

47 UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN WOMEN. (2018).

48 ECPAT International. (2017).

49 Davis, Jarrett, Glotfelty, Elliot and Miles Glenn. (2013). “Boys for Baht? A baseline study on the vulnerability of male entertainment workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand”. December 2013 as cited in ECPAT International. (2017).

50 ECPAT International. (2017).

51 *Idem.*

52 UN Women Asia Pacific. (2017). Action Not Words. Confronting Gender Inequality through Climate Change Action and Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia, An overview of progress in Asia with evidence from Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Viet Nam.

53 Gendered Vulnerabilities in Times of Natural Disasters: Male-to-Female Violence in the Philippines in the Aftermath of Super Typhoon Haiyan. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077801218790701>.

54 Plan International. (2013). Because I am a Girl - In Double Jeopardy: Adolescent Girls and Disasters.

55 UN Women Asia Pacific. (2017).

56 *Idem.*

Mental health and psychosocial support

Following the 2018 Central Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami disasters in Indonesia, 1 in 3 caregivers identified their children as experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties.⁵⁷ Disasters erode family and community structures and support for children's mental health and psychosocial well-being and safety.⁵⁸

It is estimated that globally 5 to 43% of children in disasters experience severe stress and many suffer from depression, anxiety or other mental health disturbances.⁵⁹ Although most will not require professional care, the need for responsive systems and effective local capacity to support children is high.⁶⁰ Even ten years after a disaster, the incidence of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in a disaster-affected population can be four to five times higher than in non-affected populations.⁶¹

With climate change, the mental health burden on children in disasters can be expected to rise.⁶² Specifically, new psychological conditions can emerge and existing mental illnesses among children can worsen.⁶³ Yet gaps in the current data affect the capacity of effective responses.⁶⁴

A key mental health concern among children when considering climate change is often described as "climate anxiety," "climate change anxiety," "eco-anxiety," or "climate distress."

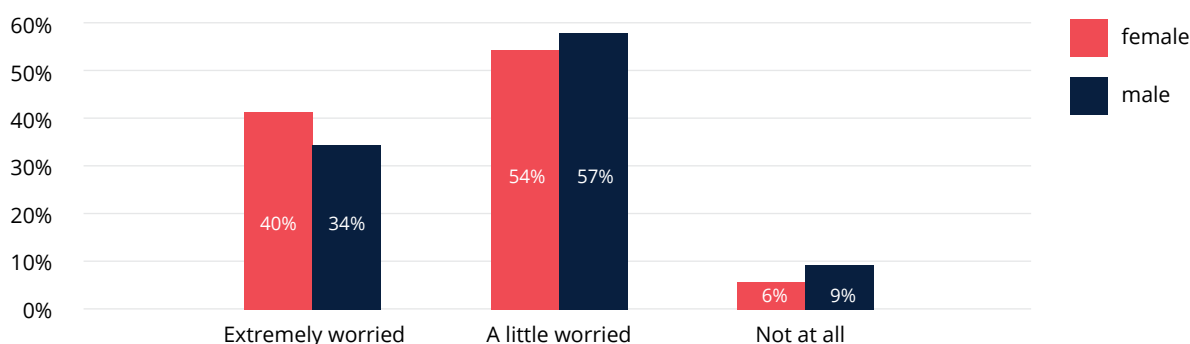
Levels of concern of children about disasters related to climate change

Ninety-three percent of children shared some level of concern (ranging from little to extreme) about climate change and disasters related to climate change, while 7% had no worries at all.

As children and young people get a stronger understanding of the issues, they become more worried.

The gender breakdown of the rate of understanding of climate change presents strong similarities between males and females.

Figure 9: How worried do you feel about climate change? (share by gender)



57 Crisis Centre at Psychology Faculty. University of Indonesia & UNICEF. (2019).

58 UNICEF. (2018). *Field Test Version of Operational Guidelines: Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings: Three-tiered Support for Children and Families*. <https://www.unicef.org/media/52171/file/Mental%20health%20and%20psychosocial%20support%20guidelines%202019%20.pdf>.

59 Kar, N. (2009, February). Psychological Impact of Disasters on Children: Review of Assessment and Interventions. *World Journal of Pediatrics*, 5(1), 5–11. Epub 2009 Jan 27.

60 *Idem*.

61 Operationalizing Psychosocial Support in Crisis Project. (2016). *The Comprehensive Guideline on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Disaster Settings*. <https://www.uibk.ac.at/psychologie/fachbereiche/psychotraumatologie/resources/opsic-mhps-comprehensive-guideline-june-2016.pdf>.

62 Dyregrov, A., Yule, W., & Olf, W. (2018, August). Children and Natural Disasters. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 9 (Suppl 2). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6095022/>.

63 Wu, J., Snell, G., and Samji, H. (2020). Climate Anxiety in Young People: A Call to Action. *The Lancet*. Elsevier. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196\(20\)30223-0/fulltext#articleInformation](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196(20)30223-0/fulltext#articleInformation).

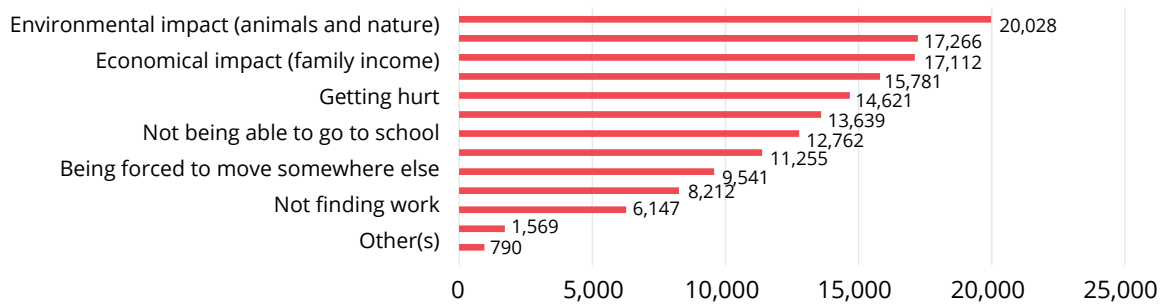
64 *Idem*

Both males and females worry about climate change, with females more likely to indicate extreme worry. Similar levels of concern were shared for climate related disasters, and in equal proportion from children and youths coming from urban and rural areas.

The majority of both genders have more than one worry associated with potential consequences of a disaster. However, girls were more likely to have five or more worries.

What Children Worry About in Relation to Climate Related Disasters

Figure 10: If you feel worried about disasters related to climate change, what are you worried about?*



* Respondents could select multiple options

The most common answer to children and young people’s biggest worry in the event of climate-related disasters was the environmental impact (negative impact on animals and nature) (61%). Over half of respondents also selected fear of their home being destroyed (52%), and economic impacts (family income) (52%).

A majority of children (64%) considered that disasters related to climate change either influenced or highly influenced the risks of physical or mental abuse to children and young people, while 17% did not know whether there was any impact at all. This 17% is higher than the percentage of children who did not think there was any relationship between disasters related to climate change and the risks of physical or mental abuse to children (14%), indicating that these risks may not be openly and commonly talked about.

“ I am scared that we might suffer the inevitable effects of climate change, and it may result in human extinction”.

“ The impact of climate will adversely affect all living things including humans”

“ Floods, natural disasters, the earth is not liveable anymore.”

“ I am worried about the damage to people and property as well as the house, we will not be able to go to school and live is also difficult.”

“ [I am worried about] family members getting hurt”

“ [I am worried about] getting too much stress”

“ All plant micro-organisms and even humans will be completely wiped out from the earth”

“ I am worried about the change in the environment of my hometown and the trauma both my country and I have suffered.”

“ As a child when there were big storms, I didn’t know how to act in such a situation. It happened quickly and I didn’t know how to adapt. I was just shocked.”

“ The daily needs of children are not met and there is no space for them: they mix with adults. Although in that situation they are too traumatized. They need healing, and a space to play.”



Child Participation

While children represent a large portion of the population in the region their voices are too rarely heard — despite the right all children have to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁶⁵

Child participation in the Philippines

In the community of Labnig, a barangay (the native Filipino term for the smallest administrative division) of the municipality of Paracale, in the Camarines Norte province of the Philippines, a children and youth led organization named “We are Empowering the Voice of the Youth” (WEVOY) was established in 2017 to promote children and youth participation in community affairs. Their efforts have led to the construction of a health center, an evacuation center, and a day care center. Moreover, the prevention of child abuse as well as the identification of learning spaces and provision of learning materials have been prioritized in the evacuation centers in case of emergencies.⁶⁶

65 UNICEF. (2020). *The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The Children's Version*. **The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The children's version** | UNICEF.

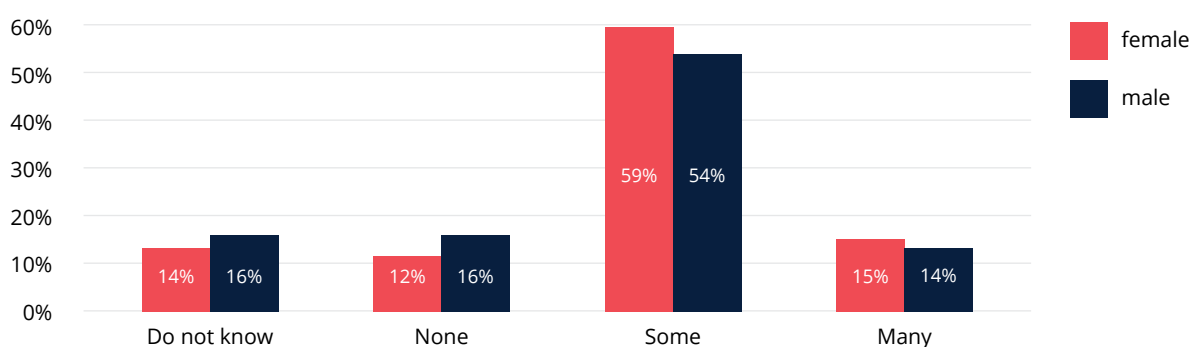
66 Adapted from Center for Disaster Preparedness. (2017). Localization of Child Protection Mechanisms. <https://www.cdp.org.ph/news-1/2017/09/29/we-empower-the-voice-of-the-youth>. and Batang Bida Laging Handa. (2019). A compilation of good practices in child-centered disaster risk reduction and management of UNICEF partners in the Philippines. https://issuu.com/cdpfoundation/docs/batang_bida_laging_handa.



Children are increasingly recognized in research as agents of change to be mobilized for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.⁶⁷ Studies suggest that children’s vulnerability is reduced and their resilience to disaster is enhanced when they: have access to resources and information, are encouraged to participate in disaster preparedness and response activities and can access personal and communal support.⁶⁸

When asked about their opportunities to participate, the majority of the children indicated having some opportunities to participate in sharing concerns and ideas to protect themselves and prepare for disasters related to climate change (57%). Fourteen percent noted they had no such opportunities.

Figure 11: Do you feel you have opportunities to share your concerns and ideas to protect yourself and prepare for disasters related to climate change? (disaggregation by gender)



67 Pfefferbaum, B., Pfefferbaum, R.L., & Van Horn, R.L. (2018). Involving Children in Disaster Risk Reduction: The Importance of Participation. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 9 (sup2). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5804784/>.

68 Peek, L. (2008). Children and disasters: Understanding vulnerability, developing capacities, and promoting resilience—an introduction. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 18, 1–29. As cited in Lopez, Y., Hayden, J., Cologon, K., & Hadley, F. (2012). Child participation and disaster risk reduction. *International Journal of Early Years Education*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263538621_Child_participation_and_disaster_risk_reduction.

Males were found more likely to feel they have no opportunity to share their concerns and ideas to protect themselves and prepare for climate related disasters. Children with one or more disability were also 4% more likely to feel as though they have no opportunity to share their concerns and ideas to protect themselves and prepare for climate related disasters.

“ I do not know where to share my concerns and ideas”

“ I don't get enough support from people around me”

“ People don't listen”

“ To live in a place where attention can easily be redirected to other things, mostly unnecessary things, a voice may not be enough to be heard, and if by chance this issue would successfully gain attention, I think it could easily be forgotten as new issues come up.”

Sixty-three percent of children believe that someone their age can make a difference on climate change, while one third of them (30%) is not sure, and only 7% think they cannot. Similar levels of confidence were shared for children and youths coming from urban and rural areas. In fact, the vast majority of them has already taken action in the past two years.

Females seem slightly more inclined to believe that they can make a difference in climate change than males. In addition, as children in Southeast Asia age, they are more and more confident that they can make a difference.

Children and young people self-identifying as originating from minority groups or belonging to refugee or migrant communities indicated stronger beliefs in their capacity to make a difference on climate change than those from the majority group.

Planting trees (67%), reduce, reuse, and recycle (56%), and equipping themselves with knowledge on climate change and related disaster risks (42%) were the top three most selected answers for how children believe they can address climate change.

Such participation is not only empowering for children themselves, but children are also active agents of change and can, and do, make significant contributions to reducing disaster risk.⁶⁹ Reviews of child-centered disaster risk reduction programs reveal positive outcomes for both the children and their communities.⁷⁰

In Laos, young Red Cross volunteers won a grant to adapt existing and complimentary tools on climate change and related disasters, the **Youth in School Safety** and **Y-Adapt**, translate them in vernacular languages and use them jointly in schools, raising the awareness of students and developing concrete action plans against climate change.

“In those areas, no one initiates those activities. It is all over the news, but the news are not calling to action. Youths do not know where to start, and once someone will initiate the activities, they will be passionate and continue in the long-term. Hopefully in the future we can bring this into policies so that in every village it becomes the law and a normal part of their lives. We also want to create youth networks and help them develop proposals and get access to similar grants to help them achieve their dreams. Believe in yourself, in what you are doing, in the future 1 % can be 2%.”

69 Mitchell, T., Haynes, K., Hall, N., Wei, C., & Oven, K. (2008). The role of children and youth in communicating risk. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 18: 254–79. As cited in Lopez, Y., Hayden, J., Cologon, K., & Hadley, F. (2012). Child participation and disaster risk reduction. *International Journal of Early Years Education*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263538621_Child_participation_and_disaster_risk_reduction

70 Lopez, Y., Hayden, J., Cologon, K., & Hadley, F. (2012). Child participation and disaster risk reduction. *International Journal of Early Years Education*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263538621_Child_participation_and_disaster_risk_reduction

“ By using my voice and talent to influence other people because I know that a little voice can create a great impact.”

“ Engage yourself to emphasize to the public that there will be more disasters to come and should worry about our world”

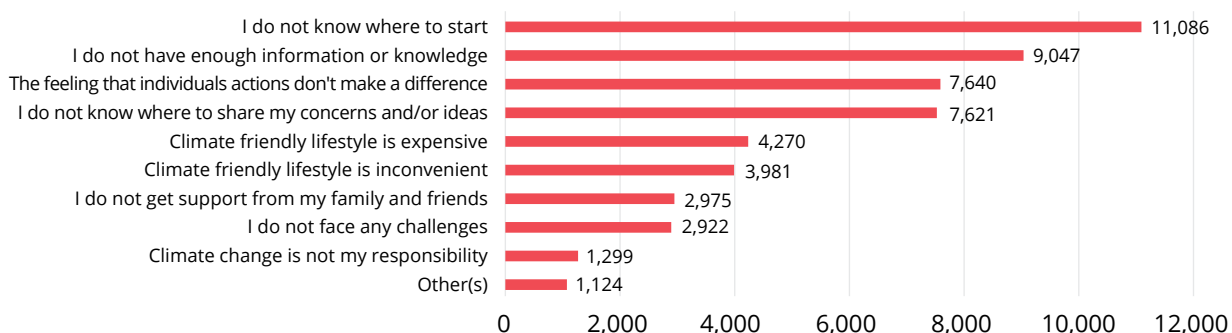
“ I can provide capacity building such as raising awareness for the advocacy and triggering the Local Government Unit to provide projects that is necessary and beneficial to address Climate Change”

“ I can give awareness to students. Because it helps the assets of the country (the students) to be sensitive to this issue.”

“ We can ask children what they can do in disaster response while following the policy for youth engagement.”

While children want to participate in actions for child protection and against climate disasters, they face barriers. The most common barriers were not knowing where to start (34%). This further underlines the need to introduce more meaningful opportunities for children to learn how and where to seek guidance.

Figure 12: What challenges do you face when it comes to acting against climate change?*



* Respondents could select multiple options

Child Centered Assessments in Timor-Leste

In Timor-Leste, local Child Centered Risk Assessments (CCRA) identified the following child protection concerns related to climate change and child protection:⁷¹

- Children at higher risk of exploitation due to decreases in household income with climate change.
- Potential for increased risks of violence due to worsening economic landscape and competition for scarce resources such as water.
- Potential for increased sexual violence and harassment against children and women associated with travelling further for water and fuel wood collection.
- Loss of livelihood opportunities in rural areas due to climate change can result in children being left behind in rural areas without proper care.
- Climate change can accelerate migration of poor children to urban areas.

71 UNICEF Working Paper. (2017). Climate Landscape Analysis for Children in Timor-Leste.

- “ **First, the adults would have to cut all means of misunderstandings: young people are very good. You would need to understand that we are young, we are not experts. You need youth data, empathize with young people if you want to work with them**”
- “ **But I don't know how to effectively get a group of people together to implement an environmentally friendly lifestyle.**”
- “ **Young people would be the persons who do the work, but no place for decision making, no ideas to put on the table, not in the lead.**”
- “ **I hear from many people say that we need intra-generational dialogue: allow them to converse and have a middleman to facilitate those conversations so that they understand each other.**”
- “ **When I do projects advocating for environmentalism, I should start with my own life and own family and relatives. But I feel uncomfortable to tell them to use ecofriendly things. They say: “you're too much”. I think it's because of the age. Adults don't like to be challenged by young people or told that this is wrong, or this is right. Although they don't say it directly. But my grandfather for instance, he is extreme, he would just stare.**”
- “ **The term activist or climate advocacy is not even translated in Thai. They are explained with very negative meaning.**”

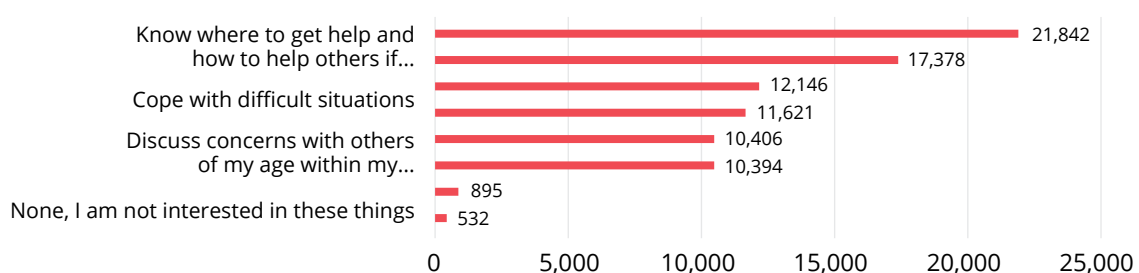
What Children Need to Act upon Climate Change and Climate Related Disasters

Almost all child participants would be interested in learning more about how to protect themselves in climate related disasters.

- “ **It is rooted inside a system where the adults education system doesn't support the child to be aware of their surrounding and climate change.**”
- “ **It's not only the parents and communities but also the teachers. Teach the teachers: if you want the children to know about child protection, climate change and related disasters, they have the main role in doing it. The teachers don't even know about climate change, and how to teach youths how to act.**”

The top three interests concern having a plan to remain safe in case of disaster (66%), knowing where to get help and how to help others if needed (52%), and participating in decision-making that affect their physical and mental well-being (37%).

Figure 13: Would you be interested in learning ways to...*



* Respondents could select multiple options

Access to protection services

In Southeast Asia, support services for victims of sexual exploitation are scarce and with limited applicability, especially at provincial, district, and community levels.⁷² They are mostly dedicated to female trafficking victims with very few services and shelters for boys.⁷³

“ So, if there is one child that gets violence from his family in the evacuation center, and the child has no power to tell about his parents, maybe he works best with a social worker? The children violented by adults should speak up and tell the social workers. But there is no protection team focusing on violence against children.”

“ Sometimes the children will not share the story to anybody. The closest ones will see how the behaviours change. We need to speak to them from our heart.”

The barriers in accessing justice systems and government’s support services for child survivors of sexual exploitation are manifolds with notably “the myth of the “willing” victim”, discrimination against adolescent victims, challenges with the best interests’ determination and failure to inform and consult survivors.⁷⁴

“ There is hotline, but people don’t know about it. We need more information about the services and more understanding about the violence.”

“ If something happens, children don’t know how to tell the authorities, or someone about what has happened.”

Also, many children do not recognise themselves as being or having been abused, until they learn that they have a right to be safe and that there are adults who can be trusted who will protect and not harm them.⁷⁵

“ Unfortunately, we don’t have awareness about child violence.”

“ There is a concern: some persons would violate or hit their children. But it is normal here, they just want to hit the children and give them valuable lessons. No one calls it violence. Children just think that their parents are angry because they made mistakes. Children are not aware as it is from their family.”

When asked whom they would ask for help if they were being threatened or had been hurt by someone, children indicated that they would most likely tell a family member (79%) followed by a police officer (46%), or a friend (44%). The least likely group that children would ask for help is religious leaders (8%).

Worryingly, many children stated that they would keep their worries to themselves if they were being threatened or had been hurt by someone.

“ I sometimes do not seek help because I want to avoid more issues.”

“ I will hesitate to ask for help or not.”

“ I will rely on myself because in this life people to trust are very rare”

“ I can’t be cured because we’re not close to the city or government to ask for help.”

72 ECPAT International. (2017).

73 *Idem.*

74 ECPAT International. (2016). Through the Eyes of the Child: Barriers to Access to Justice and Remedies for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation, Interviews with Survivors and Professionals in the Criminal Justice Systems of Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand, Bangkok.

75 Save the Children Norway. Guide to Community Based Child Protection. The Village Safety Net Programme in Cambodia.



“ There are some situations where you need someone to help you in the worst situation such as being threatened with your family’s life and being blackmailed, and in some small situations, you can handle it yourself without anyone’s help because that’s what you need to do. It’s a small thing.”

“ I tried to seek help with my problems with almost every option. But they are not listening, they are feeling that they know everything going on.”

Accessing support from violence against children in Cambodia

In Cambodia, the Commune Committees for Women and Children (CCWCs) were established as part of the decentralization and deconcentration process to be an advisory body to the Commune Council. CCWCs focus on women and children, and are tasked with planning, support, advocacy, awareness raising and monitoring of those issues. In response to reports of child abuse in the community, CCWCs also act as a referral mechanism to NGO child protection services, and to deliver services themselves.⁷⁶

76 World Vision Cambodia. (2016). Protecting Cambodia's Children? <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/CCWC-Functionality-for-CP-Full-Report-EN.pdf>.

Child Protection Systems

International and Regional Conventions on Child Protection

All the member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

An inter-agency study found several systems factors that enhance the risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation of children in the region. For instance, compliance with the standards enshrined in international conventions and treaties and recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have been strong driving factors in child protection endeavours across the region. Although, in some countries, the notion of international standards appears to have been guided by 'ideal' Western models or approaches, with little acknowledgment that there are a variety of ways that these can be interpreted and applied.⁷⁷

“ The UN just declared having a clean and healthy environment as a human right. Now it is about children recognizing their rights. I really want that publicized. But knowing their rights alone is not enough. If they know their rights, but they are violated, whom can I contact and how can I blame someone and not have this happen to me again?”

Despite progress, countries in the region lack comprehensive legislative and institutional systems for child protection on which to base a national framework to protect children from harm.⁷⁸ Shortcomings in child protection laws are one of the main challenges to implementing existing policies and regulatory frameworks.⁷⁹

“ In my country, they need fixing the age on giving consent for sex.”



Child Protection in Disaster Laws, Policies, and Regulations

In Southeast Asia like in most of the world, countries do not have in place specific laws, policies, or regulations to protect children in disasters. However, an exception is the Philippines. After Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, it has developed a model disaster law through consultation, testing, and adapting, and through involving multiple levels of government and local stakeholders.⁸⁰

77 ECPAT International, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, and World Vision. (2014). *National Child Protection Systems in the East Asia and Pacific Region: A Review and Analysis of Mappings and Assessments*, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/national-child-protection-systems-east-asia-and-pacific-region-review-and-analysis-mappings>.

78 *Idem*.

79 Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. Study on Alternative Care Community Practices for Children in Cambodia.

80 IFRC. (2020). *We Need To Do Better: Case Study Philippines*. <https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/We-Need-To-Do-Better-Philippines-Case-Study.pdf>.

Child Protection Disaster Law in the Philippines

In 2016, the Philippines enacted the Republic Act 10821, also referred to as the Children’s Emergency Relief and Protection Act – landmark legislation to protect the rights of children *before, during, and after disasters and other emergency situations*.⁸¹

The Act mandates the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to establish a comprehensive emergency program to protect children, pregnant and lactating mothers and support their recovery, immediately after the declaration of a national or local state of calamity, or the occurrence of any other emergency situation. The Act notably calls for the establishment of child friendly spaces, transitory care for children, civil documentation, and training of emergency responders on child protection.

But where there are disaster laws that include child protection, there are not necessarily budgets assigned by governments to enforce the laws.⁸² This would include ensuring an effective response, creating locally relevant and user-friendly material, training disaster responders, and disseminating laws with local communities. Government-developed guidelines on “from where and how funds will be assigned to child protection activities” is critical.

Climate Laws

As climate laws and policies are being developed, opportunities arise to address children’s risks through a holistic and multi-sectoral approach. Child-sensitive climate policy must set out sufficiently ambitious mitigation and adaptation measures to protect the rights and best interests of the child from actual and foreseeable harm caused by climate change.⁸³

Climate laws in Myanmar and the Philippines

In **Myanmar’s Climate Law**, the principle of climate justice and equity states the aim to “promote and protect the rights of the people of Myanmar, in particular the poorest, most vulnerable, and marginalised segments of society, including Indigenous peoples, all ethnic groups, local communities, women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, to live in a healthy environment and a fair, equitable, and sustainable society”.⁸⁴

The **Philippines’ Climate Change Act** states that one of the functions of the Climate Change Commission is to “coordinate and establish a close partnership with the National DRR and Management Council in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness in reducing people’s vulnerability to climate-related disasters”. Furthermore, the law directs the Department of Interior and Local Government to focus on women and children as the country’s most vulnerable to climate-related disasters.

“ *Climate change has to be solved through climate space principles, you need to have good indicators about the triggers and consequences coming. It has to be in policies.*”

81 <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2016/05/18/republic-act-no-10821/>.

82 IFRC. (2019). *Case Study: Addressing Child Protection in Disaster Law in the Philippines*.

83 UNICEF. (2019). *Are Climate Change Policies Child-sensitive? A Guide for Action: Summary*. **Are climate change policies child-sensitive (unicef.org)**.

84 AHA Centre. (2020). *ASEAN Risk Monitor and Disaster Management Review (ARMOR) 2nd edition*. Jakarta: ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre). Retrieved from <https://ahacentre.org/publication/armor/>.

Coordination for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

Effective child protection requires solid coordination between government agencies and local government units, as well as civil society organisations, the private sector, academics, and community-based mechanisms.⁸⁵

Regional Coordination

The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children 2016-2025 established a specific indicator for the creation or incorporation of a coordination mechanism into existing structures to prevent and respond to violence against children in disasters and conflict situations. Seven ASEAN Member States (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam) have established a coordination mechanism or taken specific measures to address violence against children in emergencies.⁸⁶

The creation of a regional forum allowing proper information exchange and discussions around child protection in emergencies preparedness and response was also recommended by child protection in emergencies practitioners to better integrate considerations of climate change and related disasters.

National Coordination

“ To make coordination happen you need a direction, budget and resources.”

Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, and the Philippines have included in their national emergency-response programming the prevention and response to violence against children in disaster and conflict situations.⁸⁷

Coordination in Indonesia and Lao PDR

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Social Affairs is leading the National Cluster on Protection and Displacement, which includes a sub-cluster on child protection. Raising awareness and responding to violence against children is included in the response, which often focuses on psychosocial interventions. Indonesia has a Child Protection Rapid Response Team, a national mechanism under the Ministry of Social Affairs, which can be deployed at the onset of any disaster and includes rotation of specialists across country that have regular access to skills building activities.

In Lao PDR, violence against children is included in the Protection Cluster Response Plan, which aims to ensure that the most vulnerable groups affected by the disaster are protected from violence, abuse, and exploitation (and extended trauma) and the risks of UXO. The Child Protection Emergency Cluster is co-chaired by the Department of Disaster Management and Climate Change and UNICEF.⁸⁸

Myanmar remains an exception in the region with a UN led cluster mechanism.

⁸⁵ Center for Disaster Preparedness. (2017). Localization of Child Protection Mechanisms – A research study under the project Strengthening Resilience to Disasters among Urban Poor Communities in Manila, Philippines, https://issuu.com/cdpfoundation/docs/final_research_report_on_localizati.

⁸⁶ *Idem*.

⁸⁷ Ending violence against children in ASEAN Member States, Baseline study of priority areas under the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children A snapshot as of 2016.

⁸⁸ *Idem*.

Some national coordination mechanisms have also been set up and/or strengthened as part of the Covid-19 response and provide opportunities to bridge the gap between development and humanitarian interventions by ensuring skills and mechanisms' adaptation for emergency situations.

The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children also supports national coordination. It has promoted the concept of Pathfinding, which aims to raise awareness, stimulate leadership commitment, galvanize action, and establish a standard of national violence prevention.⁸⁹

Pathfinding countries use the INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children to understand the drivers of violence and build integrated responses that improve the lives of children and young people.

Philippines: A National Effort to Protect Children⁹⁰

When the Philippines completed its first national study of violence against children in 2015, it found that a generation of children was suffering from high levels of violence. Two-thirds of children and youth experienced physical violence, and one in four sexual violence, according to the study conducted by the Council of the Welfare of Children.

This alarming data prompted the Government of Philippines to draft a multisectoral national action plan that outlines a series of commitments.

Local Coordination

At the local level, the amount and quality of multistakeholder coordination varies. Stakeholders and regional experts underline that for a multisectoral approach to be effective to protect children in localized climate related disasters, partnerships should be established as part of preparedness. Joint planning among partners and scenario mapping are essential.

Investing in child protection in Myanmar

In Hakha Township, in Chin State, Myanmar, several consultations with local communities and decision makers enabled the prediction of future changes in climate for a period up to 2050. On this basis, scenarios describing the potential impact of climate change and adaptation solutions to avoid the worst-case future scenario were developed: decision makers will need to plan for increased flash floods and landslides, strong winds, increased temperature, and erratic rainfall with greater amounts of rain within a shorter monsoon season. Increased child protection risks have been identified and should be addressed by the communities who already expect that, due to increased food insecurity, out-migration of youth and adults, especially men, will be exacerbated, and the workload of women, children, and the elderly will increase significantly.⁹¹

⁸⁹ <https://www.end-violence.org/pathfinding-countries>.

⁹⁰ Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. (2021). 2020 Annual Report.

⁹¹ ICIMOD, UN-HABITAT and UNEP. (2020). Assessment of climate change vulnerability of Hakha Township, Chin State, Myanmar 2017–2050: Scenarios for resilience building, <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/assessment-climate-change-vulnerability-hakha-township-chin-state-myanmar-2017-2050>.

While interest in emergency plans that include child protection are gaining strength, stakeholders and experts note that there are several key challenges around improved climate related disaster planning and local coordination in the region:

1. Emergency response plans tend to be fragmented in their scope, approach, and inclusivity. For example, localized emergency plans frequently focus on one particular type of natural disaster, such as floods or landslides, rather than encompassing a multi-hazards approach that would consider all risks, included those related to ongoing conflicts. In addition, climate related disasters are still seldom rated as a high risk.

“ The authorities should encourage the people in the community to know about all the disasters and conduct a campaign to focus more on child protection: How can we protect the children during the flood? How can we protect the children from the storm?”

2. Producing scientific evidence of the specific and unique challenges faced by children in local communities is vital for demonstrating to decision-makers, donors, and development actors the necessity of gender-sensitive and child-centred adaptation policies, programmes, and financing, including meaningful participation throughout all decision-making processes.

“ The leaders in my country don't rely on science.”

3. Weaknesses in data collection, particularly around disaggregated data,⁹² and an over-reliance on averages fails to capture the specific and differential impacts that climate change and related disasters have on children based on their age, sex, or other socio-economic characteristics. This in turn compromises effective policy planning, preparedness, and response.

Data collection in Thailand

In the mountainous regions of Northern Thailand, an analysis of climate change vulnerability and implications for young women and girls was carried out in the indigenous and ethnic minority communities known to be particularly at risk due to compounding factors such as lack of government support, lack of infrastructure, insecure land tenure, lack of citizenship, and access to basic services such as health and education. The derived implications for young women and girls were broken down per sector and serve as a basis for targeted action on climate change and resilience building.⁹³

4. Local referral pathways need to be accessible and realistic. Especially, in places where child protection services do not exist or are insufficient. In these situations, advocacy for the establishment and strengthening of local referrals should become a priority.

“ In my country, Social Welfare workers are supposed to take action about the violence against children in evacuation centres, but there is no social worker working for children in evacuation centres.”

⁹² UNICEF East Asia & Pacific. (2019).

⁹³ Adapted from Plan International. (2018). Climate Change, Young Women and Girls: Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation in Northern Thailand <https://plan-international.org/publication/climate-change-girls-thailand#download-options>.

5. Although local organisations are the first on the ground, their significance and potential may have been overlooked in recent emergencies. As a result, they tend to be under-utilised and arguably under-supported.⁹⁴

“ The youth to youth is really important: when young people talk to other young people, it is less invasive, there is familiarity. We relate “he might experience the same things as I do, if I shared, he would understand better”.

Strengthening partnership between local authorities and local agencies in the Philippines

Tabang sa mga Biktima sa Masbate (TABI Masbate), an NGO that used to provide relief assistance to disaster survivors in the Filipino province of Masbate engaged into community theatre to build awareness of the communities on DRR and CCA in the municipality of Milagros. Well implemented in schools and working closely with the local authorities, the NGO is now enlarging its scope of action to provide trainings to the municipality personnel on multi-hazard child vulnerability analysis and mapping system and child protection in emergencies. In return, the authorities support the logistics and security during large scale activities and facilitate TABI and its beneficiaries' participation in provincial government activities.⁹⁵

6. Local civil society organizations continue to play an essential role in frontline service delivery in many countries, including for children. Yet, limited coordination between civil society and government agencies and the lack of clear delineation of roles and responsibilities often hinders efficient service delivery and this will affect climate related disaster planning.

“ The authorities are more powerful than me alone, so they have to operate many departments and institutions to help them coordinate in emergencies. They give directions, instructions. They know best about their people. They should be running the response.”

7. The finance sector is often not part of multistakeholder planning. This is especially clear in economically poor locations of Southeast Asian countries where capacity and resources to protect children are often lowest while needs can be high.⁹⁶

“ Children and Women desks are sometimes not there. There is a desk but no personnel.”

8. Raising awareness, maintaining a level of engagement on child protection in emergencies and sustaining changes with local authorities is complex, especially within communities that have not recently experienced disasters.

“ They need to prepare the people to get ready to evacuate, to take their cloths and belongings, and have a safe place for them.”

94 UNICEF Philippines. (2016). Strengthening Child Protection Systems in the Philippines Child Protection in Emergencies.

95 Adapted from the Center for Disaster Preparedness. (2019). Batang Bida Laging Handa. A compilation of good practices in child-centered disaster risk reduction and management of UNICEF partners in the Philippines. https://issuu.com/cdpfoundation/docs/batang_bida_laging_handa.

96 Save the Children Norway. (2012). Guide to Community Based Child Protection, The Village Safety Net Programme in Cambodia.

9. National and local coordination can often be done at the level of “experts” and focus exclusively on formal protection systems. This risks leaving out traditional systems and knowledge that are the main sources of support for many children and families, especially in rural locations.

“ The government should give interest to the parents that do violence against their children.”

“ This is a very big issue, but coordination would be way better is there was no corruption.”

“ Politicians don’t allow the students to feel the consequences of climate change and that we need to act now. In fact, they don’t talk about climate change at all, how to mitigate and adapt.”

“ My friends say they don’t have trust in the government anymore.”

10. Child protection systems are generally not functioning in an integrated and holistic way. Specifically, ad hoc approaches to promoting child welfare and protection, lack of clear direction for child protection efforts and sometimes the adoption of contradictory measures are all challenges. The fragmentation of responses is common, especially when it comes to establishing and maintaining referral networks and navigating multiple and cross-sectoral systems of care.⁹⁷

“ We have to accept the reality that these politicians and adult promise us a bright future, but it is not going to be that way.”

11. Training of first responders across sectors needs to be better coordinated and improved so that child protection is built in.

“ If violence comes from within the family, the neighbors can report to the authorities. The topic should be shared with the teachers and community leaders. Because if they know, they will reduce the violence and work with the parents to explain to them the negative impacts.”



⁹⁷ ECPAT International, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, and World Vision. (2014).

Anticipatory action

Stakeholders and experts consulted for this analysis report note that local emergency plans and local coordination rarely contain child protection considerations. Few agencies analyze in detail the risk associated to children in emergencies. In consequence, early actions and response are not designed to meet the particular needs of children.

This reflects broader challenges around the integration of child protection into disaster preparedness and response actions. For example, in 2021 the IFRC with support from the Child Protection Area of Responsibility and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Climate Centre found that the linkages between child protection and anticipatory action are presently not occurring around the world. There is very little documented on the linkages and very few practical examples.⁹⁸

While there are barriers and a lack of action to date, there are practical actions that can be taken by local stakeholders to include child protection within anticipatory action.⁹⁹ These comprise the inclusion of child protection within anticipatory action triggers and indicators, child participation in decisions that affect them, local coordination between agencies and government from the anticipatory stage through to recovery stage, understanding local laws, ensuring access to helping services, advocacy with communities and authorities, having internal organizational protection systems, and evaluating responses with children's leadership. "For the floods, it took the government so long to take some action. People had to be evacuated many kilometers away, but the preparations are not fast enough, we don't even have enough equipment. People blamed the government so hard for not having given warnings."

“ During the disaster, they should have social workers focused on child priorities.”

“ Children are not placed in the priorities, the general needs of everyone are addressed first, especially in the first phases of the emergency response.”

“ Taking care of this during emergencies, is not possible. Their minds are already on the brink, so they need to be informed ahead of time.”

“ I would like to be prepared, understand what needs to be done.”

“ If only we were given the news, so we had the time to prepare.”

“ If I knew that something was happening in the coming days, I would take care of the children as otherwise they would be scared. The most important would be to give them some advice and story about how we can cross the situation. I would explain my experience and build in some advice. We would need to find a suitable location and try to comfort the children.”

⁹⁸ IFRC. (2021). *Issue Brief: Anticipatory Action and Child Protection: Acting Early to Better Protect Children in Emergencies*.

⁹⁹ Anticipatory Action and Child Protection: Acting Early to Better Protect Children in Emergencies - Anticipation Hub (anticipation-hub.org)

⁹⁹ *Idem*.

Recommendations

In order to better meet children's best interests in climate related disasters and to enhance their protection from violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, a series of actions can be undertaken.

These recommendations recognize that there are a complexity and a variety of national frameworks for child protection and that approaches need to be locally relevant. The recommendations will assist governments, donors, communities, development, and humanitarian partners, to ensure domestic implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in such contexts, and can be supported by the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and other partners, where needed.

1. Recognize the impact of climate change related disasters on children

- a) Mandate the collection and analysis of age-, gender- and disability-disaggregated data on children's needs and vulnerabilities.
- b) Ensure girls and children with particular risks are prioritized and included in protection programming,

2. Prioritize child participation

- a) In all assessments, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation regarding climate change related disasters, ensure children of diverse ages, genders, abilities, and backgrounds have meaningful opportunities to participate.
- b) Develop safe spaces where children, especially adolescents, can discuss their concerns and ideas to stay safe during climate related disasters.

3. Improve access to support services and education

- a) Ensure that child protection and education services are functional and available to all children. Draw inspiration, as appropriate, from the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Settings.¹⁰⁰
- b) Co-design with children and make widely available child-friendly information on where and how to access local support for child protection, MHPSS, and SGBV.

4. Develop, implement, and enforce laws, policies, and regulations

- a) Include child protection in all relevant laws, regulations, and policies, notably on climate adaptation and disaster related laws, policies, and regulations.

5. Strengthen local coordination

- a) Ensure multi-level coordination between national authorities and local actors, in particular local authorities, child and youth-led and community-based organizations, such as women-led organizations, faith-based networks, local NGOs, UN agencies, and Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies.
- b) Train local disaster responders on child protection.

6. Include child protection within anticipatory action for climate related disasters

- a) Invest in and include child protection within preparedness and anticipatory action for climate change related disasters.

¹⁰⁰ Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. (2019).



The vision of the IFRC is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.