

Feedback on the Council Recommendation on addressing the social and labour aspects of the just transition towards climate neutrality

Eurochild lobbying for more child-inclusive climate policies

Eurochild advocates for children’s rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. With a membership of almost 200 organisations and individuals from across 35 European countries, Eurochild is the largest network of children’s rights organisations in Europe. Eurochild works with children in all of its activities, including advocacy, governance, organising events and supports children with training and capacity building. Eurochild has a Child Participation Strategy, which supports this work, and is maintaining a high standard of meaningful and rights-based child participation supported by child protection measures.

The European Commission invited Civil Society Organisations to participate in a Strategic Dialogue online meeting on Tuesday, 26 October 2021. The topic of this meeting was the Commission’s forthcoming proposal for a **Council Recommendation on addressing the social and labour aspects of the just transition towards climate neutrality**, including a call for evidence to collect input from relevant stakeholders. In preparation of this meeting, the Commission shared a [Background Note](#), detailing its plans and vision for the upcoming Council Recommendation. At Eurochild, we believe that a just and inclusive transition towards climate neutrality must respect children and their rights to live up to its title. Although all of humanity will feel the consequences of climate change, it is children in particular who will suffer the detrimental effects in the present and future.¹ Therefore, climate justice can only be achieved if their situation, views and needs are taken into account. Yet, despite children bearing the greatest burden, they are consistently overlooked in the considerations and design of climate policies and relevant strategies.² As this Council Recommendation *inter alia* envisions to contribute towards the realisation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), taking into account the needs of children is pivotal to achieving social, just and inclusive climate policies for tomorrow.

¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General comment on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](#), accessed 05 November 2021.

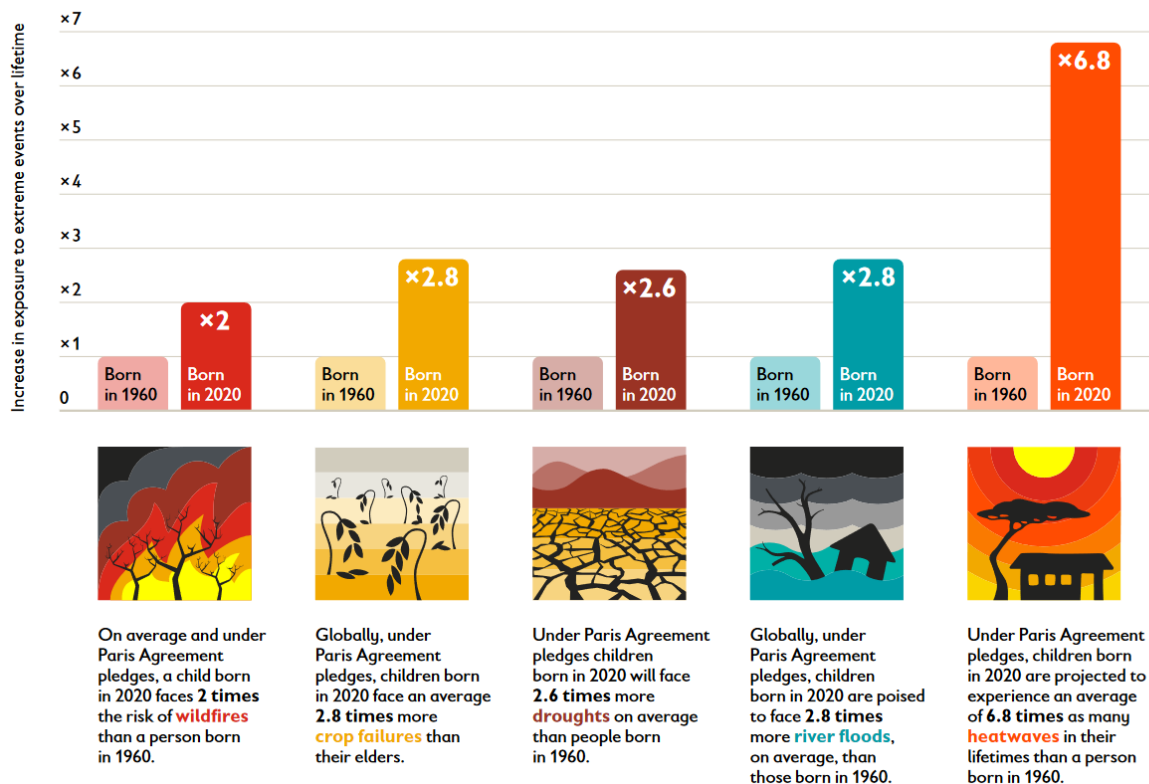
² UNICEF, [Are climate change policies child-sensitive?](#), May 2020, p.6.



Children on the Frontline: The Nexus between Children Rights & Climate Change

At [Eurochild](#), we welcome the EC's focus on social and labour challenges within the context of climate neutrality. We particularly endorse that this Background Note highlights issues of "energy poverty, systemic inequality, reduction of poverty, and equal opportunities". In this regard, we would like to emphasise that all these issues affect the development and well-being of children, but that we could not find any explicit references to children and adolescents in the document.

The **increased severity and frequency of natural disasters** presents enormous risks to children future and current reality. A child born in 2020 will experience on average twice as many wildfires, 2.8 times more crop failures, 2.6 times as many drought events, 2.8 times as many river floods, and 6.8 times more heatwaves during their lifetime, compared to someone born in 1960.³



Source: Save the Children, [Report](#) Born into the Climate Crisis, p.7.

³ Save the Children, [Born into the Climate Crisis](#), September 2021, p. 7.



For children, natural catastrophes can **disrupt school**, exacerbate **economic and food insecurity**, or lead to **forced displacement**.⁴ By the end of 2020, an estimated 2.9 million children globally were displaced internally as a consequence of natural disasters.⁵ Especially in areas where livelihoods depend on agricultural revenues, climate change can affect a region's entire economic future and children's life prospects. Until today, employment of children's parents depends on the ecosystem in many regions: 16% in the EU; 8% in France; 6% in Germany; and 11% in Italy.⁶ Next to natural catastrophes, children are also suffering from other aspects related to climate change such as **ambient air pollution**. In 2016, 93% of all children under five worldwide were exposed to high levels of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}).⁷

Climate change and natural catastrophes disproportionately affect **low-income families** and their children due to the inability to relocate, lack of financial resilience and necessary resources to adapt to a changing environment. Hence, children growing up in poor households are at higher risk of being affected by natural disasters and are likely to suffer from their aftermath for longer. **Traumatic childhood experiences** negatively affect children's development and mental health, potentially impacting their education performance and future productivity across their life course.⁸

On a policy level, climate change and natural catastrophes potentially deny **children's basic rights** enshrined in the European Child Guarantee, such as access to early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing. Therefore, it is fundamental to grant children their basic rights in climate-related initiatives and support this vulnerable group in an ever-changing natural environment. **Including children** in relevant climate instruments will allow them to access their rights to services, meet basic needs and have a future.⁹ Climate change also affects the realisation of the 20 Principles of social protection as set out in The European Pillar of Social Rights, which this Council Conclusion aims to contribute to. Overall, policy initiatives relating to the ESF+, ERDF, EGF and so forth should strive for a common and coherent understanding of children's needs in times of climate change while **refraining from exacerbating existing problems** children deal with already.

⁴ Nicole Adrian et al., [Climate Change & Child Poverty in OECD Countries](#), 2020, p.6.

⁵ UNICEF, [Child Displacement](#), September 2021.

⁶ Nicole Adrian et al., [Climate Change & Child Poverty in OECD Countries](#), 2020, p.13.

⁷ World Health Organization, [Air Pollution and Child Health](#), 2018, p.2.

⁸ Nicole Adrian et al., [Climate Change & Child Poverty in OECD Countries](#), 2020, p.5.

⁹ Save the Children, [Born into the Climate Crisis](#), September 2021, p. 8.



Working towards more child-inclusive & cross-sectoral policies

At Eurochild, we welcome the wide scope of this initiative and consider “an adequate mix of accompanying policies [...] supportive of the green transition” appropriate to respond to the multitude of issues caused by climate change. Yet, the strong focus on designing comprehensive policy packages and strengthening enabling elements supporting policy actions must go hand in hand with the objective of **including children and young people across different policy areas**. For instance, notions such as “ensuring access to quality and inclusive education” must take into account the difficult situation of schoolchildren during the pandemic.

In addition, we support that **common definitions, concepts and methodologies** contribute towards better policies. A common understanding of children’s needs and challenges with regard to the social aspects of climate change would increase awareness about their anxieties across policy areas and allow for more comprehensive responses to their problems during this climate crisis. As this initiative seeks to design a comprehensive policy package, it is important to connect to policies affecting and protecting children. Considering the multitude of policy areas and initiatives affecting both, children and climate change, **cross-sectoral action** is essential. For instance, from Eurochild’s perspective, we would welcome a link between the European Child Guarantee Initiative, the EU Strategy on the rights of the child, policies on early childhood development and the RRE among others.

In addition, we believe that Member States must be encouraged to reduce the administrative burden regarding access to and management of EU funds to ensure **optimal use of public and private funding**.

Just like in policy processes, priority should be given to children in relevant financial instruments to ensure that climate initiatives benefiting them do not lack adequate financial strength.

Allowing Children and relevant Stakeholders a Seat at the Negotiation Table

Notably, the first pillar of the EU Strategy on the rights of the child details, that children should have a **right to participate in political and democratic life**. Decision-makers must recognise children as key agents of change in the climate crisis and respect their role as environmental human rights defenders in law and practice.¹⁰ Hence, EU institutions as well as other actors should ensure **outreach to children** and young people and develop a methodology of how to best reach and include them in relevant decision-making processes. Especially with regard to climate change, children must have a seat at the negotiation table to **co-influence** their own future. As children should be always considered in decision-making processes, we welcome the Commission’s proposal to make 2022 the European Year of Youth. This initiative will increase awareness of children right’s in and beyond the EU and potentially create a more child-inclusive

¹⁰ Save the Children, Born into the Climate Crisis, September 2021, p. 44.



political environment. As expressed in an opinion piece by Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Eurochild, children must become a **priority at the highest political levels** for a stable and prosperous Europe in the future.

As many civil society organisations working directly with children poses first-hand knowledge about their needs and fears concerning climate change, consulting them during the various stages of this Recommendation will provide valuable insights for the EC and eventually lead to a more effective and recognised EU instrument.¹¹

¹¹ Eurochild, Save the Children, UNICEF, Child Fund, World Vision, [Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future](#), 11 February 2021, p.73-75.

