

## Climate Change Q&A

### How does climate change affect children?

Climate change means more floods, droughts, heatwaves and other severe weather events, which in turn present numerous risks for children:

- Immediate dangers, such as drowning or heatstroke.
- Loss of parents, which can leave children without protection.
- Increased risk of vector-borne diseases, to which children are more vulnerable than adults.
- Loss of livelihood, which can lead to undernutrition of young children, particularly in poor areas.
- When water supplies are compromised, children face a higher risk of diarrheal diseases – a leading cause of death in children under the age of 5.
- Research shows that severe weather events and their aftermath can have a significant and long-lasting impact on young children's cognitive and physical development.

The impacts of climate change will likely continue worsening over the lifetime of today's children, and their children.

### How many children are exposed to climate change?

Everyone will become increasingly affected by climate change, but some areas are more exposed than others, and some communities lack the means to cope with the droughts, floods and other events that are likely to increase.

Our report *'Unless we act now – The impact of climate change on children'* shows that 530 million children live in areas where floods are extremely likely to occur and 160 million in areas where drought severity is high or extremely high.

### Where are the flood and drought zones?

The vast majority of the children living in areas of extremely high flood occurrence are in Asia, and most of those in high and extremely high drought zones live in Africa and Asia. In many cases, these zones are in countries that lack the resources to cope with disaster because of high levels of poverty. Of the 530 million children in areas where floods are extremely likely to occur, 300 million are in countries where more than half the population lives in poverty – on less than \$3.10 a day. Of the 160 million in zones of high and extremely high drought severity, 50 million are in countries where more than half the population lives in poverty.

### What can be done to protect children?

The most urgent is to act now to curb greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit the rise in global temperature. What the world does now to cut greenhouse gas emissions can

dramatically reduce the number of children threatened by the most severe impacts of climate change in the coming decades.

But even the most ambitious likely measures will not spare children from significant climate changes caused by the carbon already emitted into the atmosphere, so it is essential to take measures to protect children from the impacts of climate change.

We need to:

- Make sure all children, particularly the most disadvantaged, have access to health and social protection systems, safe water and adequate sanitation, good nutrition and food security. This will give them a basis for coping with the effects of climate change in future. Reducing inequity now builds children's future resilience to climate change.
- Scale-up proven approaches to address the changing needs of children. For example, in areas where malaria, dengue and cholera are likely to increase, programmatic adjustments will be needed and preparations should begin now.
- Collect high quality data and conduct accurate surveillance and monitoring of disease through primary care information systems, as well as improved climate modelling.
- Have good adaptation plans in place. Planning and policies on climate change preparedness, response, and recovery must take into account the full spectrum of children's needs before, during, and after severe climate events. Schools must be safe and education must not be interrupted; community infrastructure must be safe and relief and reconstruction interventions must help reduce future and current risk.
- Protect children displaced as a result of climate change. Measures need to be put in place both nationally and internationally so that children are protected and their rights are upheld whether they move internally or across borders.
- Provide children and youth with education, awareness raising on climate change and how to lead low-emission, climate-resilient lives.
- Recognize that children and youth can provide solutions on climate change. Their voices must be heard.

### **What happens if greenhouse gas emissions are not cut?**

Under a business-as-usual scenario in which the global community takes limited action to reduce emissions, we project that by **2050**, 1.45 billion children would live in zones where the maximum average surface temperature will change by more than 2 degrees Celsius. That number would drop to 750 million children if moderately ambitious action is taken and to 150 million under a highly ambitious scenario.

A 2° rise doesn't sound like much, but it is. Even small changes in average temperature can mask much larger variations in extreme temperatures. In cold regions, 2°C might be enough to melt glaciers and snowcaps; while in hot regions, it might be enough to evaporate rivers and lakes and stop plant seeds from germinating. Projections indicate temperature changes will take place across much of South America, Africa, Australia and the Middle East, as well as in colder climates – including northern Russia and Canada.

Even areas where temperature changes are comparatively low will be affected. Changes in temperatures over oceans, for example, can affect the formation of hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones that might hit land hundreds of kilometres away. And climate change leading to reduced biodiversity in one area can have far wider implications, affecting for example food security, the development of medicines and the transmission of certain diseases.