

## COP28: a critical crossroads for education and the climate agenda

**The Send My Friend to School Coalition is calling on the UK Government to take decisive action to ensure that education is systematically integrated in the global climate agenda.**

The 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) presents a critical crossroads for education in the climate agenda. In December 2023, the UAE will host COP28 where world leaders will convene to accelerate global action to tackle the climate crisis.

For the first time, a thematic day dedicated to education will take place. This builds on the first inter-ministerial session on climate change and education held at COP26 in Glasgow. This is a welcome development as education is often left out of the climate agenda despite education systems being central to an effective climate response.

**COP28 presents key opportunities to advance commitments that recognise and address the intersections between education and climate action.**

# The climate crisis is an education crisis

Climate change is driving an unprecedented level of crises globally, causing widespread disruptions in the education of over 37 million children each year.<sup>1</sup>

From the destruction of schools and learning materials as a result of natural hazards and disasters, to climate-induced displacement uprooting children from their homes, the climate crisis is threatening children’s right to education.

In 2022, the Horn of Africa experienced its worst drought in forty years,<sup>2</sup> driving a hunger crisis that is having a negative impact on children’s education: in Kenya alone school attendance fell by 10.4 % since before the drought began<sup>3</sup>. In the same year, 3.5 million children had their schooling disrupted by devastating floods that plunged one-third of Pakistan underwater.

**Those who have contributed least to the climate crisis are the ones most affected by its impacts:** the poorest and most marginalised children, including girls, children with disabilities, and migrant and refugee children, are hardest hit and are at risk of being left behind.

The climate crisis has already displaced more than 50 million children, and by 2025 the climate crisis will contribute to preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education<sup>4</sup>.

## Children and young people are calling for action



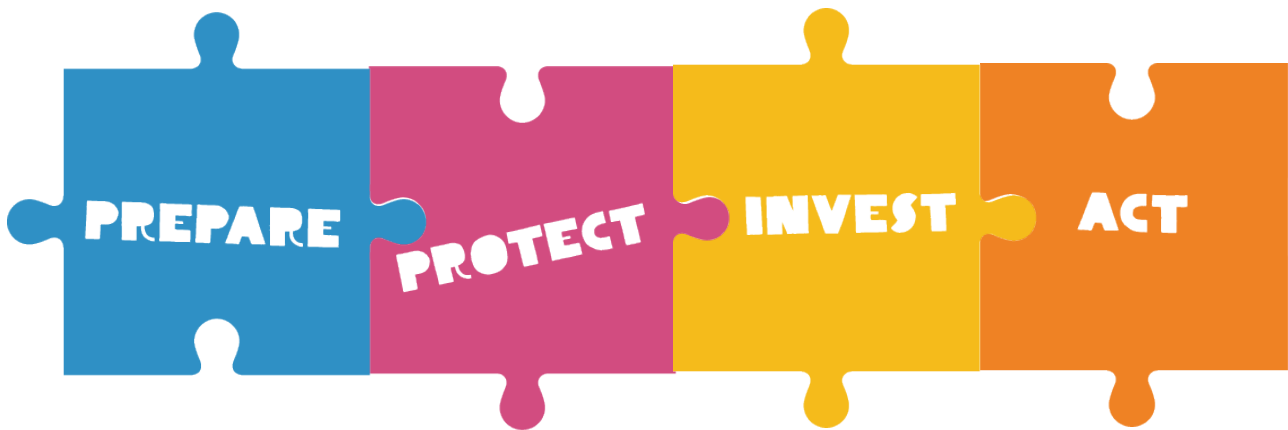
**“We have seen the devastating impacts of climate change on education firsthand. As youth, we are working directly with communities to drive forward collective action and ensure education is protected at times of crisis. But we also need our voices to be heard in key global decision-making spaces”**

Angela, Youth for Education in Emergencies Panel Member, Malawi<sup>5</sup>

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Children and young people are calling for education to be prioritised in the climate agenda: they have been a driving force behind climate action, and their experiences and recommendations are critical for climate justice to be realised. **Despite this, education is often left out of the climate agenda.** In a review of Multilateral Climate Finance projects, only one out of 591 projects focused on education as its principal objective<sup>6</sup> and 45 % of national education documents made little to no reference to environmental themes.<sup>7</sup>

1 Save the Children. (2021). ‘Born into the Climate Crisis: Why we must act now to secure children’s rights’.  
 2 World Meteorological Organisation. (2023). ‘State of the Global Climate’.  
 3 Plan International. (2023). ‘Beyond Hunger: the gendered impact of the global hunger crisis’.  
 4 Malala Fund. (2021). ‘A greener fairer future: why leaders need to invest in climate and education’.  
 5 Plan International UK. (2023). ‘Youth for Education in Emergencies Global Youth Panel’.  
 6 Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative. (2023). ‘Falling Short: Addressing the Climate Finance Gap for Children’  
 7 UNESCO. (2021). ‘Learn for our planet: a global review of how environmental issues are integrated in education’.



Education is also overlooked in climate financing with at most 0.03 % of all climate finance being spent on education<sup>1</sup>. **Yet resilient education systems are critical for an effective global climate response.** In times of crisis, education is protective, lifesaving and life-sustaining - especially for the most marginalised children.

**“I feel the need to meet school leaders because it is at school that children learn, and that’s where they can get a quick sense of the consequences of climate change”**

Isaac, Climate Activist in Malawi<sup>2</sup>

### **COP28 presents an opportunity for the UK to take decisive action on education and climate change**

The UK’s presidency of COP26 secured commitments to consider education in the climate agenda, including the 10-year Glasgow Work Programme<sup>3</sup> on Action for Climate Empowerment. Education and Environment Ministers also adopted a joint commitment<sup>4</sup> recognising education as critical to combating

climate change. At the UN Transforming Education Summit, UNESCO together with the UK, Japan, UNEP, and UNFCCC launched the Greening Education Partnership - a global initiative that takes a whole-of-system approach to address the climate crisis by harnessing the critical role of education.<sup>5</sup>

The UK Government has since increased and formalised its ambitions to address the climate crisis in and through education. This includes, the 2030 Strategic Framework for International Climate and Nature Action<sup>6</sup>, the 2023 International Climate Finance Strategy<sup>7</sup>, and the 2022 position paper on education and climate<sup>8</sup>.

**However, ambitions need to be supported by actions.** The UK has been criticised for recent developments in its climate policy, such as new oil and gas projects and threats to its international climate finance commitment, which have damaged its reputation on the global stage.<sup>9</sup> COP28 provides a crucial opportunity for the UK Government to secure commitments and actions to ensure that climate change does not undermine a child’s right to education.

1 FCDO. (2022). ‘Addressing the climate, environment and biodiversity crises in and through girls’ education’.

2 Oxfam GB. (2019). ‘Jessy and Isaac - Climate Activists in Malawi’.

3 UNFCCC. (2021). ‘Review of the Doha work programme on Article 6 of the Convention’.

4 UK Government. (2021). ‘co-Chairs Conclusions Of Education And Environment Ministers Summit At Cop26’.

5 UNESCO. ‘Greening Education Partnership’.

6 UK Government. (2023). ‘2030 Strategic framework for international climate and nature action’.

7 UK Government. (2023). ‘UK International Climate Finance Strategy’.

8 UK Government. (2022). ‘Addressing the climate, environment and biodiversity crises in and through girls’ education’.

9 Climate Change Committee. (2023). ‘2023 Progress Report to Parliament’

## Recommendations for COP28

The Send My Friend to School Coalition is calling on the UK Government to take decisive action to ensure that education is systematically integrated in the global climate agenda. At COP28, this includes:

1. **Just transitions:** Ensure that the benefits of a green transition are felt and realised by the most marginalised children including those experiencing poverty, indigenous communities, girls in all their diversity, and children with disabilities, through equalising access to green skills development, supporting pathways to green jobs, and addressing disparities in education outcomes.
2. **Global Goal on Adaptation:** As the framework of the GGA is being decided this year, the UK should advocate for education to be properly included throughout the goal and ensure that it is represented within the targets and indicators for the goal.
3. **Finance:** We will not be able to stay within 1.5°C without international cooperation, and climate finance is a critical cornerstone of this. The world is looking to COP28 to deliver this, and it is imperative that the UK delivers increased climate finance that is new and additional to ODA, with clear mechanisms for grants-based financing to reach countries and communities most affected by the impacts of the climate crisis.
4. **Loss and Damage Fund:** As a member of the transitional committee for the operationalisation of the loss and damage fund, the UK Government should champion the need for significant finance for loss and damage to be directed to education, recognising it as a child-critical social service. There should be an explicit focus on children's rights, needs, voices and equity in the operationalisation of the fund.
5. **Adopting an inclusive, justice-centred approach to climate action:** The UK should prioritise initiatives that focus on building resilience of the most marginalised to deal with the impacts of the climate crisis, recognising the potential of education to act as a tool to reduce social and environmental inequalities. This includes creating opportunities to harness the experiences and recommendations of children, young people, girls, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups through meaningfully involving them in climate processes in the run-up to, and following, COP28, in a safe, diverse and inclusive manner.

### About Send My Friend to School

Send My Friend to School is the UK civil society coalition of international development NGOs, teachers unions and charities. It brings together young people, politicians, teachers, civil society and the media in joint campaigning to demand quality education for all children across the globe.

Find out more about our "Let My Friends Learn" campaign on education in emergencies in our policy report.

**#LetMyFriendsLearn @sendmyfriend**