



## *UNICEF Official Statement on the occasion of the 2022 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction*

The 2022 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) comes at a critical time for children and young people as they face immediate and long-lasting consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. A rise in anxiety and depression amongst adolescents... a worldwide increase in child marriage... and accelerating child labour and poverty rates are heavy burdens for the next generation to carry into adulthood.

Millions have also been affected by school closures with high dropout rates and an almost insurmountable loss of basic numeracy and literacy skills, especially among younger and more marginalized children. For instance, COVID-19-related school closures continue to disrupt access to education of 270 million children in East Asia and the Pacific region, with 150 million children experiencing psychosocial distress due to COVID-19. Similarly, children in South Asia have lived through some of the longest school closures in the world, disrupting learning for over 430 million children. The pandemic has also further exacerbated the impact of natural hazards and climate-related disasters.

History has shown us that time and time again children's needs and participation are missed in resilience-building efforts, participatory planning and DRR decision-making. We cannot stay on this trajectory if we expect to reach the goals of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by 2030. We urgently need child-centred disaster and climate risk management to build resilient communities and societies both *for* them and *with* them.

Building back better from the pandemic means putting children and young people at the heart of the global COVID-19 response and recovery. They should be first in line for investment and last in line for cuts; and should not have to bear the burden of this pandemic for the rest of their lives. The policy and investment choices the global community and governments make now will determine the prospects of an entire young generation. The voice of communities, and particularly children and young people, should define the response.

Sadly, COVID-19 is not the first or last disaster they will face. According to a recent UNICEF publication, over 580 million children across the East Asia and Pacific region are vulnerable to the global environmental crisis. These children, and future generations of children, will grow up living with the climate and disaster impacts.

With limited safety nets that can impede quick recovery, girls, women, people with disabilities and families living in poverty can be especially vulnerable after disaster. High rates of mortality, gender-based violence, negative mental health impacts and reduced access to essential services (like quality education and reproductive healthcare) can affect them most. When disasters strike communities, everyone is not impacted equally. For example, adolescent girls in low-resource settings or who have been displaced must overcome comparatively greater odds to continue their education.

Children and young people are more than victims with limited resources to cope. They also have an active role to play in reducing disaster risk as agents of change, as independent leaders, and in collaboration. Children's and young people's own experiences are being used to create safer societies and communities. Their innovative ideas are improving risk assessments, early warning systems and community-based risk reduction. They are developing school evacuation protocols and recovery plans that fit their unique needs, advocating for their rights in local to international disaster management policies and raising awareness on reducing disaster risk in their communities and beyond.

Children and young people need to be equipped and empowered with increased knowledge and skills to be better prepared for and resilient to disasters and climate impacts and able to meaningfully participate in key disaster- and climate-related decisions and actions. As Lovelen G. Cadagdagan, a DRR youth champion and the President of the School Hydrometeorological Information Network (SHINE), has emphasized: including young people in disaster risk reduction provides us not only space for participation but it also increases our capacities to be more prepared. If we are capacitated enough, I do believe that we have the power to raise awareness in our respective communities to know better how to respond in various emergencies.

At UNICEF, it is imperative that no child is left behind in reducing disaster risk and building resilience. As one example, in 2021 alone, UNICEF and its global partners supported more than 305,000 young people across the region to lead and participate in offline and online civic initiatives in DRR, climate, environment and energy. As examples, at UNICEF we support children and young people in:

- Applying innovative ideas to engage adolescents and young people disaster risk reduction and management
- Supporting evidence generation and risk analysis, including climate and disaster impact studies and risk assessments;
- Advocating for their rights in local to international DRR, environmental & climate policies; and child-centered DRR knowledge and experience sharing;
- Helping to develop school disaster risk reduction in alignment with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework;
- Leading climate and environmental action to mitigate climate-related disasters and for a more sustainable world.

In addition to engaging children and young people, UNICEF implements DRR and CCA programming in across the region, including in remote, fragile, conflict-affected and risk-prone contexts, and partners with the most marginalized and at-risk children and young people.

UNICEF and its partners are committed to integrating DRR and CCA into development and humanitarian efforts to strengthen the resilience of children, families, communities and countries. Programmes work through a holistic vision for and with children and young people so they can gain skills, knowledge and resources to survive, grow and develop. Building children's and young people's resilience and meeting the targets of the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030 — and those in other global agreements — is complex, urgent and requires a team effort.

At UNICEF, we are working closely with young people and supporting organizations like the Major Group for Children and Youth DRR working group; Children in a Changing Climate; and the Asia Pacific Coalition for School Safety; as well as regional inter-governmental partnerships such as ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; and SAARC, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. We are also collaborating with industry and inter-agency partnerships like CADRI, the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative; CBI, the Connecting Business initiative, ARISE, the International Federation of the Red Cross, and the United Nations Issue-Based Coalition on Building Resilience.

Within and across multiple sectors, UNICEF is committed to working with partners to reduce the disproportional risks children face before and after a disaster. Leaving no child behind in increasingly frequent and severe disasters requires collaboration through strong partnerships with networks, governments, UN agencies, civil society, academia, the public and private sectors and, most critically, children and young people themselves. Across the region, UNICEF and its partners' work include:

- Setting up systems and capacities for shock-responsive social protection, including cash transfer mechanisms;
- Helping to develop school disaster risk reduction and evacuation protocols and recovery plans that align with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework;
- Sharing guidance and lessons for risk-informed education programming for resilience and child-centered DRR;
- Gathering and sharing age- and gender-disaggregated data on disaster risk, climate risk and gender-responsive disaster risk management;
- Promoting participation and engagement of adolescents and young people in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and proposing strategies and actions for making communities resilient;
- Providing COVID-19 mental health support through multi-stakeholder and adaptive approaches;
- Brokering public-private partnerships to keep children safe during COVID-19

At UNICEF we are converging the DRR, climate change, and humanitarian agendas to maximize impact on the ground. To be effective, national and subnational development and humanitarian programmes must integrate DRR and climate change strategies, policies and practices into critical sectors that support children's survival and wellbeing: Social protection, education, water and sanitation, health, nutrition and child protection. For example, social protection systems should be more responsive to future disasters, not only to the level of past disaster impacts. And our efforts to build resilience in general cannot wait for one crisis to be over before making progress, so we are pushing for risk-informing humanitarian efforts, including through co-leading inter-agency capacity building efforts on this. Within our Strategic Plan, we emphasize the opportunity (and necessity) for convergence: for example, supporting preparedness frameworks to be calibrated to a changing climate.

Efforts that can truly make an impact for our youngest generation, and in turn the wider society, must be backed up by strategic investment in children and young people so they can develop, grow and contribute to their communities. Since 2018, UNICEF has invested more than US\$30 million in disaster risk reduction and recovery across the region — with attention on reaching the most marginalized and vulnerable children and young people from the poorest communities. However, we cannot meet the targets of the Sendai Framework without more investment. We at UNICEF call on governments and other stakeholders to act urgently to:

- Strengthen partnerships with and capacities of governments, private sectors, and other stakeholders in child-centred DRR and CCA
- Empower all children and young people to increase their knowledge and skills in DRR and CCA actions and to meaningfully participate in key disaster- and climate-related decisions
- Integrate child-specific concerns into national and local DRR and climate change policies and actions
- Ensure child-critical services are more resilient to and prepared for disasters.

Join us in ensuring every country is prepared; every child is resilient.

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#### **Official Statement – Data Sources**

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- <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/legal-empowerment-advance-climate-and-environmental-justice>