

## Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child Regarding Draft General Comment No. 26

### A. Introduction

1. The Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies ('EiE Hub') makes this submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child ('Committee') in response to their call for comments on the Draft General Comment No. 26 (202x) ('Draft General Comment') on Children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change.
2. The EiE Hub is an alliance of likeminded states, organisations and experts committed to presenting a unified voice in shaping and influencing education in emergencies (EiE) policy in Geneva and beyond, stepping up visibility, political and operational commitments, and funding for EiE.<sup>1</sup> The EiE Hub harnesses the expertise and capabilities of International Geneva's diplomatic humanitarian, development, human rights, protection, climate migration, and peace communities and organisations, along with academia, to come together for transformative joint action for EiE.<sup>2</sup>
3. The EiE Hub welcomes the Committee's General Comment on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change.
4. The EiE Hub's submission relates to Section III (C) of the Draft General Comment on the right to education, and includes comments and recommendations on various important aspects of EiE. The EiE Hub recommends the Committee include specific references to the importance of EiE throughout this section of the Draft General Comment.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of EiE Hub members can be found at <https://eiehub.org/about/members>. The EiE Hub was launched in January 2021 after 10 co-signatories pledged at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum to promote Geneva as the Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. The initial co-signatories are Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Global Education Cluster (GEC), the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Switzerland, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, the Geneva Graduate Institute and the University of Geneva. Since January 2021, 31 additional members joined the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies: Action For Development (AFD), Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Arigatou International, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Canada, Concern Worldwide, Danish Alliance for Education in Crisis, education.org, Educators Without Borders International (EWBI), Enfants du Monde, Finn Church Aid, Fraternity International Humanitarian Missions, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), Helpcode, Humanitarian Development Partnerships (HDPi), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Parliamentary Network for Education in Emergencies (IPNEd), International Rescue Committee (IRC), IsraAid, Jacobs Foundation, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Niger, NORCAP, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), People in Need (PIN), Plan International, Safe to Learn Coalition, Save the Children, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, and World Vision International.

<sup>2</sup> EiE Hub (2021) *Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies 2022-2025 Strategy*, <https://eiehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/EiE-Hub-2022-2025-Strategy.pdf>

## B. Education in Emergencies and Climate Change

5. As identified in paragraph 31 of the Draft General Comment, protecting and promoting children's right to education in the context of climate change is important from two key perspectives: first, due to the way in which education, which is a fundamental human right, is needed to curb and raise awareness and preparedness for climate change; and second, because education can be highly affected by the impacts of climate change. Prioritising EiE is thus vital to provide support for climate change adaptation and mitigation, and to address the rapidly intensifying climate emergency which threatens children's rights to education globally **and often compounds existing emergencies**. Further, in support of the centrality of the child rights-based approach, education is a platform for recognizing and enhancing children and young people's participation as equal stakeholders in addressing the climate emergency.

### *Climate change as an emergency*

6. Climate change is a global emergency negatively affecting the rights of children. Almost all of the world's 2.2 billion children face at least one major climate-related risk, such as, cyclones, drought, flood, disease, heatwaves torrential rains and air pollution.<sup>3</sup> Some groups and locations are more affected than others, and some groups are at greater risk of being left out of climate resilience efforts, including children with particular religious, racial, ethnic and linguistic characteristics. One billion children live in countries that are at severe risk of suffering the effects of at least three climate-related disasters simultaneously, which threatens their right to education and more.<sup>4</sup> These children and young people are exposed to multiple climate-related hazards and shocks, such as water scarcity, heat and cold waves, forest fires, tropical storms, air pollution, drought and flooding, and high vulnerability due to conflict and violence. Furthermore, extreme weather events have become an increasing factor in people's displacement in the last decade.<sup>5</sup> **This increases the urgency of addressing the effects of climate change on education, especially in emergencies.**
7. The EiE Hub notes that 'emergency' is only referenced twice in the Draft General Comment (para. 51 and para. 106), without explicit recognition of climate change being an emergency. **The EiE Hub recommends specific reference to the importance of prioritising education in emergencies, and the identification of the climate crises as an emergency.**

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF (2022) *The heat is on! Towards Climate Resilient Education Systems in South Asia*, [www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/heat-is-on-southasia](http://www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/heat-is-on-southasia)

<sup>4</sup> EiE Hub (2022) *Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies Annual Progress Report 2022*, [https://eiehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/EiE-Hub\\_Annual-Progress-Report-2022.pdf](https://eiehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/EiE-Hub_Annual-Progress-Report-2022.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2020) *Understanding the climate change-displacement-education nexus for building resilient and equitable education systems*, [https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/downloads/background\\_papers/background\\_paper-nexus.pdf](https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/downloads/background_papers/background_paper-nexus.pdf)

### ***Strengthening resilience through Comprehensive School Safety***

8. All children have the right to safety and survival, protection, development, and participation, and every child should be able to realise these rights in school. Yet climate change and natural threats (in addition to other threats such as technological, epidemics and pandemics, violence, conflict, and everyday threats) put children and school staff at risk. When these threats are realised, they can cause permanent, compound impacts on the development of children and societies, and these impacts are felt differently due to gender, disability, and social and economic inequalities, leaving the most marginalised children unacceptably vulnerable.
9. A response to these threats is set out in the *Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030*:<sup>6</sup> an all-hazards, all-risks approach to protecting children and education, offering governments a practical framework to make urgent progress across a multitude of children's rights and the sustainable development agenda.<sup>7</sup> According to this Framework, States should ensure Comprehensive School Safety (CSS), including a participatory risk-informed approach to:
  - a. Protect learners, educators and staff from death, injury, violence and harm in schools and other learning spaces.
  - b. Plan for education and protection continuity, and limit disruptions to learning in the face of shocks, stresses, hazards and threats of all kinds.
  - c. Promote knowledge and skills of learners and duty-bearers, to contribute to risk reduction, resilience building, and sustainable development.
10. Mainstreaming CSS in the education sector is essential to address climate change challenges and ensure child rights and resilience, as well as those of their families and communities. States should ensure that an ongoing national school safety coordination mechanism utilizes the collective impact of education and other government authorities, and their partners, by providing oversight and guidance to ensure that enabling policies and systems facilitate: 1. Safer School Facilities, 2. School Safety and Educational Continuity Management, 3. Risk Reduction and Resilience Education. This will support ongoing risk identification, risk reduction, response preparedness, and rapid recovery to proactively address climate threats to education.
11. A resilient education sector is a key contribution towards climate change solutions. Investing in multi-sectoral, multi-hazard, risk-informed and crisis-sensitive planning and disaster risk management increases education systems' hardiness to climate shocks. A CSS approach engages school communities (students, teachers, staff, parents and

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<sup>6</sup> [www.preventionweb.net/publication/comprehensive-school-safety-framework-2022-2030](http://www.preventionweb.net/publication/comprehensive-school-safety-framework-2022-2030)

<sup>7</sup> The CSSF was developed by the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES), a multi-stakeholder platform comprised of UN Agencies, International Non-Governmental Agencies, other leading humanitarian and development organizations and similar regional alliances, advocating for and supporting child rights, resilience and sustainability in the education sector, and revised for 2022-2030 to reflect the rising threats to children and education as a result of climate change, increased conflict, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

others, including, where possible, non-school actors such as community and civil society representatives, local and regional human rights monitors, and the private sector) in participatory action to reduce climate-induced risks. It prevents deaths, injuries and harm in schools, reduces education disruption due to hazard impacts, protects educational infrastructure investments, and builds a culture of safety and resilience. States can reduce children and young people's vulnerability to climate shocks and reduce inequities by increasing funding for education, for safer and greener schools, and for EiE.

12. Education in emergencies can help increase countries' adaptation to the negative effects of climate change.<sup>8</sup> By educating children and young people at risk or already affected by crises, EiE helps them develop skills that increase their resilience. School curricula need to include disaster risk reduction: climate risk, mitigation and adaptation, safety, and skills for environmental protection (including on biodiversity, pollution and climate), and sustainable development. States should elaborate Climate Education Plans that enable children and youth to have contact with nature. The children of the present will only be able to preserve and be caretakers of the environment if, as children, they were able to practice nature preservation which will enhance sustainable actions in the future and prevent other disasters.
13. There is an urgent need for ambitious action towards resilience-building in the education sector in the face of climate change and compounding emergencies. This should be at the forefront of the Committee's guidance on climate change and its impact on children's rights and the right to education. To ensure adequate links between the political and operational commitments regarding EiE, **the EIE Hub recommends specific reference be made to the value of quality Comprehensive School Safety and the value of EiE as part of a robust response to climate change.**

### ***Protecting the right to education in climate emergencies***

14. Climate change fundamentally affects education and contributes to the global education crisis, and threatens children and young people's ability to fully enjoy their right to education. Climate change disrupts learning, increases learning loss, compounds emergencies, and adds to learning poverty for the most disadvantaged children and youth.
15. Both sudden- and slow-onset impacts of the climate crisis on education are wide-ranging and complex. Extreme weather events and climate-induced displacement increase the risk of school drop-out as children and youth spend extended time outside classrooms. Storms, torrential rains, forest fires, floods, heat and cold waves, not only expose children and youth and teaching staff to physical harm (especially in contexts where there is little investment in safe school infrastructure), but also damage and destroy

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<sup>8</sup> IDMC (2021) *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021*, [www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/](http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2021/)

school infrastructure and disrupt learning. Droughts may keep children and young people out of school, while the impacts of warming, heat and pollution, significantly impact educational attainment. The incremental economic impacts of the climate crisis may cause children to drop out of school permanently, as families struggle to cope financially.

16. Children and youth already impacted by crises, conflict, violence, inequality, and discrimination, including girls, those with disabilities and indigenous and minority children and youth, as well as children with particular religious, racial, ethnic and linguistic characteristics, are the most severely affected.
17. In addition, the climate emergency brings with it damages to the development of children and adolescents, from severe psychosocial distress, and in some instances, trauma. The extent of psychosocial distress influences human development in the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social realms. This impacts children and young people's ability to enjoy their right to education.
18. **The EIE Hub recommends specific reference be made to the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change on education in emergencies, and the particular vulnerability of those already impacted by crises.**

### ***Protecting the right to education in climate-related humanitarian crises***

19. There are important linkages between education and child protection in humanitarian settings, including those humanitarian settings that are climate-related.<sup>9</sup> Children and adolescents need more opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them,<sup>10</sup> to improve the quality and accessibility of protection referral services, to co-design with children solutions, and ensure better local coordination between key agencies including education actors to protect children.<sup>11</sup> More needs to be done to enhance the protection of children in climate-related disasters, including the inclusion of children and adolescents in anticipatory action on climate disasters.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See further: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPHA), <https://alliancecpa.org/en/child-protection-humanitarian-action-and-education-emergencies>

<sup>10</sup> For example, the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) has gathered concerns and ideas around protection from violence and access to education in the context of climate change from over 33,000 children and young respondents aged 10-25, in addition to adult stakeholders from UNICEF, Red Cross National Societies, governments, and local and international non-governmental organizations: see footnote 11 below.

<sup>11</sup> IFRC (2022), "We Need To Do Better: Climate Related Disasters and Child Protection in Southeast Asia", <https://pgi-staging.ifrc.org/resources/we-need-do-better-climate-related-disasters-and-child-protection-southeast-asia>; IFRC (2022), "We Need To Do Better: Climate Related Disasters and Child Protection in Eastern and Southern Africa", <https://www.ifrc.org/document/we-need-do-better-climate-related-disasters-and-child-protection-eastern-and-southern>; IFRC (2022), "We Need To Do Better: We Need To Do Better: Climate Related Disasters, Child Protection and Localizing Action in the Caribbean", <https://shared.ifrc.org/record/~ba947297f4>

<sup>12</sup> IFRC, "Issue Brief: Anticipatory Action and Child Protection", [www.anticipation-hub.org/resources/issue-brief-anticipatory-action-and-child-protection](http://www.anticipation-hub.org/resources/issue-brief-anticipatory-action-and-child-protection)

20. EiE is a powerful vehicle to promote the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people trapped in crises. In humanitarian responses, EiE can serve as an anchor of connection, meaning and positive relationships for children, young people and their communities. The impacts of climate change on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people needs to be incorporated into the responses of States and other actors.
21. It is also relevant to consider the impact of the climate emergency on crops and access to food, and the impact the food and nutrition crises has on children and young peoples' education. According to the World Food Programme, 349 million people across 79 countries are facing acute food insecurity - up from 287 million in 2021.<sup>13</sup> Food insecurity is also a factor that contributes to psychosocial distress in the short, medium, and long term, affecting children and youth irreversibly. It has an interconnected impact upon the right to education: when a child's right to food is not being met, it is difficult to learn.

#### ***Education in emergencies for climate displaced children***

22. Globally millions of internally displaced and refugee children and young people are missing out on their right to education. Millions more are likely displaced or forced to migrate by the impacts of climate change, but they are not yet represented in official numbers, making it difficult to account for them and support them adequately. Crisis-affected and displaced children and youth, along with their families, consistently identify quality education as a priority.
23. Education in emergencies can be a pillar to recovery, self-reliance, adaptation and peaceful coexistence for children and young people fleeing environmental emergencies, climate disasters, and other impacts of climate change. In times of climate emergencies, education services may not be available, or children may face significant legal, administrative, economic, social, and cultural barriers to access. Children and young people with disabilities are particularly at risk, and may find that schools are not prepared to accommodate their needs, particularly during and following emergencies. For both displaced and local children and young people, schools can get crowded, and teachers and resources may be insufficient and inappropriate. Where social dynamics are altered, this can lead to lower educational attainment, drop-out, child protection issues such as child labour and child marriage, and social tensions.
24. **The EIE Hub recommends specific reference be made to the obligation of States to plan for and provide EiE, ensuring EiE is appropriate to the needs of those displaced by climate change and environmental emergencies.**

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<sup>13</sup> World Food Programme, 'A Global Food Crisis', <https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis>

### C. Recommended amendments and additions to Section III (C) on the right to education

The EiE Hub makes the following recommendations:

1. Amend para. 31: “Education is one of the cornerstones of a child rights-based approach to the environment. ~~Children highlighted e~~Education is instrumental in protecting children’s rights and the environment and in increasing their **agency and capacity to curb climate change, as well as their knowledge, understanding and skills, which enhance their** awareness and preparedness for environmental damage. The right to education is also highly vulnerable to the impact of environmental harm, including due to school closures and disruptions, dropouts from school, and destruction of schools and places to play.”
2. Add a para. 31 bis: “**Climate change is a global emergency threatening directly children’s right to education, often compounding existing emergencies. Extreme weather events such as heat and cold waves, storms, torrential rains, drought, wildfires, and floods, can have both sudden and incremental impacts on children’s right to education. Climate-related disasters can expose children and teaching staff to death, injury, and physical harm, damage school infrastructure, and disrupt educational attainment both immediately and over time, including due to long-term economic impacts. States should address the effects of climate change on and in education and ensure financial resources and adequate policy measures to prioritise education in emergencies, including by simplifying administrative procedures for climate displaced children in accessing education.**”
3. Amend parts of para. 33: “... Curricula should reflect changing environments and new environmental science, **and should develop knowledge and skills that increase children’s resilience to climate change, including disaster risk reduction education and addressing climate risk, mitigation and adaptation, safety, and skills for biodiversity, environmental protection, and sustainable development.** Teaching materials should provide accurate, updated and age- and developmentally-appropriate environmental information. **States should invest in training teachers to face multilingual and multicultural classrooms, as well as the psychosocial distress of their students.** All children should be equipped with the skills necessary to face expected environmental challenges in life such as **climate emergencies** and disaster risks, including the ability to critically reflect upon such challenges, solve problems, make well-balanced decisions and assume environmental responsibility in accordance with their evolving capacities.
4. Add a para. 36 bis: “**States should build the resilience of the education sector in the face of climate change, including through multi-sectoral, crisis-sensitive and risk-informed planning and programming, with a comprehensive approach to school**

safety and provision of quality education in emergencies, in consultation with children, teachers and parents, and others, and through the collection of disaggregated data and evidence to inform planning and programming. Policymaking must also take into account intersectionality to address barriers that affect learners in addition to climate change and displacement.”

5. Amend para. 37: “States should build greener and safer infrastructure resilient to disasters, and solutions that increase access, such as alternative learning modalities. States should ensure physical access to schools during severe weather events, especially for children in remote or rural communities, or consider alternative teaching methods, such as mobile educational facilities and distance learning, and prioritize underserved communities for climate-proofing and renovation of schools. States should consider introducing flexible school calendars, tracking progression of children who exit and enter schools according to migratory patterns and ensuring access to accelerated learning programmes. States should identify public buildings, as opposed to schools, to be used as dedicated emergency shelters following climate emergencies or, if schools are used as shelters, identify other structures to be used as schools.”
1. Add a para. 37 bis: “States should ensure quality education in emergencies and comprehensive school safety, particularly for children already displaced and/or impacted by crises, conflict, violence, inequality and discrimination, before, during and after times of environmental crises and climate emergencies. This includes planning for and providing education for children and young people displaced or affected by climate change, rather than relying on informal systems.”
2. Amending para. 38: “States should also address the knock-on effects resulting from environmental impacts on children, such as the need for girls to leave school due to the additional domestic and economic burdens in households facing environment-related emergencies, shocks and stress.”

## Further resources on Education in Emergencies and Climate Change

Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF), [Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030](#)

EiE Hub, 'Education in Emergencies and the Climate Crisis', <https://eiehub.org/education-in-emergencies-and-the-climate-emergency>

Government of the United Kingdom (2022) *Addressing the climate, environment, and biodiversity crises in and through girls' education*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/addressing-the-climate-environment-and-biodiversity-crises-in-and-through-girls-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/addressing-the-climate-environment-and-biodiversity-crises-in-and-through-girls-education)

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2022) [Disaster Risk Reduction Collection](#)

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2021) [Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021](#)

IDMC (2020) [Understanding the climate change-displacement-education nexus for building resilient and equitable education systems](#)

Christina Kwauk and Amanda Braga, (2017) ['3 ways to link girls' education actors to climate action'](#)

Malala Fund (2021) [A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls' education](#)

UN Transforming Education Summit (2022) *Education in Crisis Situations: A Commitment to Action*, [www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/education-crisis-situations](http://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/education-crisis-situations)

Save the Children (2021) [Born into the Climate Crisis: Why we must act now to secure children's rights](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/born-into-the-climate-crisis.pdf), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/born-into-the-climate-crisis.pdf>

Save the Children (2022) *GENERATIONHOPE 2.4 billion reasons to end the global climate and inequality crisis*, [www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/generation-hope-report-global.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/generation-hope-report-global.pdf)

Save the Children (2021) [Build Forward Better: How the Global Community must act now to secure children's learning in crises](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Build-Forward-Better-How-to-protect-education-from-the-climate-crisis-FINAL.pdf), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Build-Forward-Better-How-to-protect-education-from-the-climate-crisis-FINAL.pdf>

Save the Children (2021) [Walking into the Eye of the Storm: How the climate crisis is driving child migration and displacement](#)

Theirworld (2018) [Safe School: The Hidden Crisis – A framework for action to deliver Safe, Non-violent, Inclusive and Effective Learning Environments](#)

UNICEF (2022) [The heat is on! Towards Climate Resilient Education Systems in South Asia](http://www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/heat-is-on-southasia), [www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/heat-is-on-southasia](http://www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/heat-is-on-southasia)

UNICEF (2021) [The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index](#)

UNICEF UK (2021) [Futures at Risk: Protecting the Rights of Children on the Move in a Changing Climate](#)

UNICEF (2019) [It is getting hot: Call for education systems to respond to the climate crisis](#)