**Submission on the General Comment No. 26 of the Committee on the Rights of**

**the Child on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change**

We are in a period in which the crises we face are more diversified and their intersectional effects are being felt more and more strongly every day. The current age of crises affects education in different ways and dimensions, as is the case for other rights and systems. This concept note focuses on the education-related components of the draft general comment under different headings.

**Early childhood education**

Education plays an important role in understanding the impacts of the climate crisis and building knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes toward the climate crisis.[[1]](#footnote-1) *The Climate Crisis Is A Child Rights Crisis* report prepared by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) states the finding that children and communities who receive education are generally empowered and more adaptive in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Providing access to education in early childhood is closely related to children’s right to development.[[3]](#footnote-3) How children experience growth and development in this period differs according to their gender, living conditions, family structures, care, and education systems, as well as their individual characteristics.[[4]](#footnote-4) Research shows children in the early childhood period are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups facing the negative impacts of environmental crises. In this respect, strengthening early childhood care and education services in a protective, preventive, and restorative manner to address the impacts of environmental crises is important.[[5]](#footnote-5) This advisory general comment could put more emphasis on strengthening the enhancement of early childhood care and education services in response to crises. It is also necessary to design mechanisms to support teachers and other professionals working with children and families. Provided services should be empowering and participatory for children and create space for them to exercise their rights in ways that are in line with their developing capacities. Establishing links between early childhood services and efforts geared towards mitigation and adaptation to the impacts of climate change with early childhood services would result in more impactful efforts in both areas.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Different aspects of education environments**

The draft general comment provides a detailed framework for ensuring that the physical infrastructure of educational environments is safe, healthy, and resilient. However, the impact of learning environments on the learning process is not related solely to the physical aspects. In order to ensure children’s wellbeing, it is crucial to procure an educational environment that protects children’s physical and mental health and in which children feel safe and can form a sense of belonging in order to ensure child wellbeing.[[7]](#footnote-7) Research conducted under pandemic conditions reveals the importance of school as a relational space that determines children's subjective wellbeing.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In the interviews conducted with children, more than half of the participants reported that they were concerned about the healthiness of the environment, while very few reported that they were optimistic that the problems would be solved.[[9]](#footnote-9) In this regard, it is important to strengthen the emotional and social dimensions of educational environments and to implement measures that would prioritize children at risk.[[10]](#footnote-10) The general comment should encourage the State Parties to establish inclusive and holistic resilience mechanisms, which would take into account diverse circumstances and needs, in their education systems. It is important to include clear and understandable statements in the general comment on how this incentive will be realized in educational settings, starting with early childhood.

**Displacement and education**

Different sections of the draft general comment deal with subjects about children who are displaced due to environmental crises. Displacement due to environmental crises also hinders children’s access to the right to education.[[11]](#footnote-11) Displaced children face difficulties in accessing education due to different factors such as language barriers, poverty, traumatic effects of displacement, instability, and discrimination.[[12]](#footnote-12) Accordingly, States Parties should be encouraged to take steps to ensure that education policies and processes can withstand the pressures of climate crisis-induced migration, displacement, and increased mobility. It is stated that there are socioeconomically disadvantaged groups in countries that are directly affected by the climate crisis in *The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis* report published by UNICEF. Climate crisis-induced displacement deepens the difficulties that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups already face in accessing education. The general comment should emphasize the right to education of displaced children, in particular in early childhood care and education.

**Family and community inclusion in education**

Caregivers play an important role in the realization of children’s rights, especially those in the early childhood period. The Convention recognizes that parents and legal guardians are primarily responsible for ensuring the development and wellbeing of children and obliges States Parties to provide appropriate services to enable the fulfillment of child-rearing responsibilities.

Services provided to families should be sustained in a way that corresponds to their needs in order to ensure the full realization of children's rights during environmental crises. Especially the services related to early childhood care and education serves as an early intervention program. In early intervention, childcare providers along with the schools need to be empowered in the face of the climate crisis. Focusing on the schools alone and excluding child caregivers limits the impact of endeavors planned and implemented in response to the climate crisis. In this respect, ensuring those who are responsible for caring for the child can benefit from the school's physical environment and also participate in the education program implemented in the school would facilitate the implementation of sustainable policies against the climate crisis and thus contribute to social transformation.

Making those involved in the child's ecological system an effective part of the education processes and programs to ensure that their agency is recognized along with the child’s would ensure that the child is empowered not only at school but also outside of school.

**In lieu of a conclusion**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that education should be designed to develop respect for the natural environment. Although this reference in the Convention to "respect for the environment" is very important, we see the general comment as a critical opportunity to take this emphasis one step further. The entire general comment should emphasize that there is no mutually exclusive dichotomy between nature and humans, and should adopt this as a fundamental principle. In order to surmount the current and future crises with the least harm possible and more importantly to help the badly damaged Earth to restore itself, it should be acknowledged that education, in its current state, is one of the systems that consolidates humans’ unsustainable ways.

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