5 December 2023

Reference: WHRGS/HRC/RES/54/19

**Call for submission for a report on how climate change can have an impact on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) presents its compliments to the Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva and has the honour to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 54/19 on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl.

The Human Rights Council requested OHCHR to submit a report, based on evidence, before the end of its fifty-seventh session, on **how climate change can have an impact on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, highlighting how the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl can contribute to the climate change agenda and making recommendations** using information provided by all United Nations Member States, United Nations entities, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders.

In this regard, OHCHR is seeking inputs from Member States and other stakeholders to inform the preparation of the aforementioned report. OHCHR would appreciate receiving written contributions, responding to the information requested in the annex.

Submissions should be received by **1 March 2024** and be:

* Limited to 5 pages, in Microsoft Word format;
* Written in English, French or Spanish, as much as possible;
* Sent by email to **ohchr-registry@un.org** with **aydan.figaroa@un.org**in CC**,** including in the e-mail subject line: **input to HRC report on equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, pursuant to HRC resolution 54/19**.

Submissions will be made publicly available, in full and as received, on the OHCHR website, unless otherwise requested.

Any enquiries may be addressed to Aydan Figaroa at **aydan.figaroa@un.org**.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva the assurances of its highest consideration.

# **UNESCO contribution - Call for submission for a report on how climate change can have an impact on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl**

Kindly note that, unless otherwise indicated, the information provided in this contribution is extracted from the UNESCO global report “[Learning at risk: the impact of climate displacement on the right to education](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000387895_eng)” (2023). This report was published as part of UNESCO’s Initiative on the impact of climate change and displacement on the right to education, ongoing since 2020.

1. ***The most important barriers for girls to their equal enjoyment of the right to education****, in relation to:*
	* *Potentially harmful impacts of climate change, including those on environmental degradation, and/or;*
	* *Root causes of their unequal enjoyment of the right, exacerbated by climate change.*

The climate crisis is not gender-neutral; the consequences experienced by women and girls are exacerbated by pre-existing gender inequalities, threatening their rights, including the fundamental right to education.

The **availability** of education for women and girls can be severely compromised by the effects of climate change. The damage or destruction of educational infrastructure by rapid-onset events, but also the use of schools as shelters during or after natural disasters, disrupt the continuity of education, and once out of education it is likely that many students, particularly the most vulnerable such as women and girls, will never resume their education.

The shift to online education, often seen as a solution in times of crisis including because of the effects of climate change, presents its own difficulties. Many countries do not prepare or implement distance learning programs, preventing continuity of education when in person education is not possible. Moreover, access to distance learning requires digital devices and an internet connection, resources which are not available in all households, nor in all areas/regions, and access to which may be compromised by the effects of climate change (destruction of the home, and therefore loss of digital equipment, or destruction of internet infrastructures). These challenges are particularly acute in rural areas, which already suffer from a lack of digital equipment and connectivity, and which see these disparities exacerbated by climate change. Even when internet connection and digital tools are available, the digital skills gender gap and the gender gap in digital access make it more difficult for girls to use these tools, including for education.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Women's and girls' **access** to education can be hampered by several barriers, whether physical, economic, administrative, legal or resulting from pre-existing gender-based inequalities and violence. Physical access to school can be prevented when school buses are requisitioned for disaster evacuation, or when school roads are destroyed by natural disasters. Access to schools then becomes difficult and sometimes even dangerous for girls.

Economic barriers also arise when climate change jeopardizes livelihoods, particularly in the agricultural sector, making it difficult for families to pay school fees when education is not free and, in many cultures, families tend to prioritize educating boys when they cannot afford to send all their children to school. The loss of livelihoods can also encourage families to make girls work to the detriment of their schooling, to support the family in difficulty. Indeed, due to pre-existing inequalities between men and women and stereotyped gender roles, women are often expected to take care of the home, children and agricultural chores, to the detriment of their education.

Administrative obstacles can also arise when important documents (previous diplomas, identity papers, etc.) are lost in disasters, making school enrolment impossible. Even when in possession of these documents, the lack of recognition by the host country of diplomas obtained in a foreign country may prevent the student from enrolling at a level of education corresponding to his or her own.

Access to education for women and girls can be hampered by legal obstacles, in particular the lack of rights for climate-displaced people, whether in terms of their right to enter or reside in host countries or even internally in some cases (without which they may not try to enroll in a school for fear of being expelled), or their right to education.

Pre-existing inequalities between men and women exacerbate the various obstacles outlined above. Natural disasters have a disproportionate impact on women, who face increased risks of injury and mortality due to entrenched gender inequalities that have created disparities in information, mobility, decision-making and access to resources and training. After a disaster, women often have difficulty accessing relief and assistance, compromising their livelihoods, wellbeing and recovery[[2]](#footnote-3). Pregnant women and young mothers are particularly vulnerable, as they face increased risks of the spread of vector-borne diseases, leading to a deterioration in the health of mothers and newborns. Climate-displaced women are further marginalized because of the precarity of their situation. In addition, climate change exacerbates gender-based violence, including child marriage, forcing married girls to drop out of education.

The impact of climate change on women's and girls' right to education extends to the **acceptability** of education, presenting significant barriers to their access to acceptable learning environments. With regard to the acceptability of learning conditions, the shortage of teachers, caused by the displacement of teachers due to climate change, leads to classrooms with far too high a student/teacher ratio, or to selective enrolments favouring boys over girls. In addition, the influx of climate-displaced populations, in addition to the "normal" number of students, puts a strain on existing educational resources (especially as they may also have been damaged or destroyed by damage induced by the effects of climate change), compromising the quality of teaching. These two obstacles are particularly acute in rural areas, which may already have suffered from a lack of teachers or educational resources before the impacts of climate change were felt.

The **adaptability** of education systems can also be compromised by the impact of climate change, and the displacements induced by it. The importance of the mother tongue for effective learning is a major obstacle. In many communities, particularly indigenous or minorities, teaching materials in the mother tongue are essential for understanding and engagement in the learning process. However, in the case of climate-induced displacement, across borders or even within a single country when many different languages are spoken, it is very common for the schools in which displaced students find themselves not to provide education in their mother tongue, for teachers not to be trained in it, for there to be no teacher from their community, or no teaching materials in the language in question, thus hindering these students' chances of academic success. In addition, the program's lack of respect for diverse cultures, particularly those of indigenous or minorities, further marginalizes women and girls from these communities. This is all the more deplorable given that indigenous women especially have an important understanding of sustainable land and natural resource management practices[[3]](#footnote-4), which are essential for mitigating and adapting to climate change. By failing to recognize and include their leadership and expertise, education systems are missing an opportunity to foster inclusive and effective strategies for coping with the impacts of climate change.

1. ***Concrete measures taken to respond to the barriers faced by girls indicated above****.*

To address the challenge of **availability** of education for women and girls in the face of climate change-induced disruptions, it is imperative to invest in resilient school infrastructure. This involves constructing schools to withstand natural disasters by implementing stringent building codes, retrofitting existing structures, and enforcing zoning policies for school construction in safer areas. Additionally, identifying and repurposing public buildings other than schools as emergency shelters can ensure that educational facilities remain accessible even during disasters. Furthermore, leveraging alternative pedagogies and distance learning approaches developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or recent school closures due to climate change impacts can facilitate the continuity of learning, particularly for girls in marginalized communities.

As far as **accessibility** to education is concerned, several concrete steps could be taken. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by climate-displaced people, legal frameworks must be established to recognize their status and guarantee their rights, including the right to education, entry and residence in host countries. Aligning the minimum legal working age with the end of compulsory schooling can prevent exploitation and ensure that girls have the opportunity to continue their education. Financial support initiatives for students from poor households - poverty created or exacerbated by climate change - and for people displaced by its effects are essential, as are simplified administrative procedures for school enrolment, particularly for climate-displaced people (CDPs). In addition, improved digitization and streamlining of school records can facilitate access to education for climate displaced students, while comprehensive education on human rights, including gender equality, can counteract prejudices that prioritize boys' education over girls' education.

Measures to improve the **acceptability** of education for girls and women facing the effects of climate change include strategies to attract and retain teachers in underserved areas, particularly those hosting climate-displaced populations. Financial support mechanisms for teachers in climate displaced persons areas can encourage their presence, while temporary solutions such as support from volunteers or contract teachers can meet immediate educational needs. In addition, preparing schools to accommodate the influx of climate-displaced people after disasters by increasing structural capacity and allocating resources according to data can ensure continued access to education for girls and women.

Prioritizing the **adaptability** of education to the needs of girls and women impacted by the effects of climate change requires tailored interventions (gender-sensitive facilities, safe transportation, training in gender-responsive teaching practices…). Special attention should be paid to the most vulnerable among them, i.e. women and girls from minority, indigenous, disabled, poor, rural, elderly, LGBTQIA+ and migrant communities. It is also essential to improve the preparation of schools and teachers to meet the linguistic needs of climate-displaced populations, ensuring that teachers are trained in different languages, or that teachers with the same mother tongue or from the same community are hired, that educational resources are accessible and inclusive for all girls and women, whatever their origin or situation.

1. ***The most important existing gaps and challenges in education to empower all girls to contribute to the climate change agenda.***

The lack of information and sex-disaggregated data on how climate impacts differ between men and women is a major problem. This lack of knowledge leads to a poor understanding of the nuanced vulnerabilities faced by girls and women in the context of climate change. In the absence of comprehensive data, policymakers and educators struggle to tailor interventions to the specific needs of girls, hindering their ability to develop resilience and adaptability in the face of environmental challenges.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Building girls' resilience and adaptability in the context of climate change requires equitable access to skills development, technical and vocational education and training opportunities. However, girls, particularly those from marginalized communities, often face barriers that prevent them from accessing quality education and training programs that equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to cope with the complexities of climate change. Moreover, although teachers are convinced that teaching about climate change is crucial, most of them are not trained to teach it[[5]](#footnote-6), leaving students ill-prepared to understand the complexities of climate change and its implications for their lives and communities.

Communities are not sufficiently educated about climate change and its effects on men and women, particularly where women working in agriculture are concerned. Women, who make up a significant proportion of the world's agricultural workforce, face multiple barriers to accessing resources and decision-making processes related to climate change adaptation and mitigation[[6]](#footnote-7). The unequal distribution of resources and decision-making power makes women disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Because of this lack of awareness and power, women find themselves deprived of the opportunity to build resilience and make a significant contribution to the construction of gender-sensitive responses to climate change.

Furthermore, women's lack of involvement in decision-making processes and their under-representation in decision-making institutions and climate funds further marginalize their voice and hinder their climate leadership potential. Women's disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities exacerbate these problems, as they face increased burdens during climate-related disasters, limiting their participation in decision-making and hindering the adoption of gender-sensitive climate policies.[[7]](#footnote-8)

1. ***Concrete measures taken to empower all girls through education to contribute to addressing climate change****, including in their adulthood, and if relevant, in relation to the four elements of the right to education.*

Empowering all girls and women to contribute effectively to the fight against climate change requires a multi-faceted approach that harnesses the potential of education to bring about positive change. One concrete step is to carry out a gender analysis to assess how the impacts of climate change affect women and men differently. By identifying gender inequalities and gaps, policymakers and educators can develop evidence-based climate policies and actions that prioritize the needs and experiences of girls and women.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Ensuring equal access to training, credit and skills development programs is an important step in enabling girls to participate fully in climate change initiatives. It is also crucial to integrate comprehensive Education for Sustainable Development into curriculum, pedagogy and teacher training, adapted to each country’s specific situation and socio-economic characteristics and elaborated with the participation of youth, so that girls can become an active part of the solution in mitigating and fighting the effects of climate change.

In addition, when developing and implementing new climate policies, it is essential to ensure that men and women benefit equally from budget allocations for climate action. This ensures that girls have the support and resources they need to engage in climate-related activities and initiatives. It is also essential to create new financing mechanisms that specifically support women's participation in climate action. The active participation of women in the development of funding criteria and the allocation of resources to climate change initiatives, particularly at local level, can help address gender disparities and enhance the effectiveness of climate interventions. [[9]](#footnote-10)

UNESCO launched in 2020 a global [initiative](https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/climate-change-displacement) to investigate the barriers to education posed by climate change directly, as well as climate-driven displacement, taking into account the policy implications thereon. The aim of this initiative is to provide operational policy recommendations for policy makers globally which help ensure the right to education in national and regional systems for persons affected by climate change, including girls and women, followed by capacity building and technical support to States.

UNESCO also launched the Greening Education Partnership[[10]](#footnote-11), a global initiative that takes a whole-of-system approach to support countries to tackle climate crisis by harnessing the critical role of education. As a collaborative platform for governments and other stakeholders including inter-governmental organizations, civil society, youth, academia, and private sector, Greening Education Partnership aims to deliver strong, coordinated and comprehensive action that will prepare every learner to acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to tackle climate change and to promote sustainable development. The Greening Education Partnership is structured around four key pillars of transformative education: Greening schools; Greening curriculum; Greening teacher training and education systems’ capacities; greening communities.

* + ***Data disaggregated by sex/gender, age, disability****, and if possible, also by other grounds, including income, race/ethnicity, geographic location and migratory status;*
	+ ***Information on girls who are in vulnerable situations and/or who face intersecting forms of discrimination****, such as those who are affected by humanitarian crises, armed conflicts and disasters; living in poverty; married, pregnant or have children, with disability, and/or belonging to minorities or indigenous communities.*
* As many as 80 per cent of those displaced by climate change and natural disasters are women and girls. They are also 14 times more likely to die in the aftermath of a natural disaster.[[11]](#footnote-12)
* It is estimated that 158 million women and girls are pushed into poverty as a direct result of climate change, 16 million more than the total number of men and boys.[[12]](#footnote-13)
* At least 200 million adolescent girls living in the poorest communities face a heightened risk from the effects of climate change. [[13]](#footnote-14)
* Average female participation in the workforce is 20 percentage points lower than their male counterparts, largely because of a persistent lack of opportunities, particularly in accessing education.[[14]](#footnote-15)
* If current trends continue, by 2025 climate change could prevent more than 12 million girls from completing their education each year.[[15]](#footnote-16)
* Women carry out more than 75 percent of unpaid care work, or 3.2 times more than men.[[16]](#footnote-17)
* If all women smallholders received equal access to resources, their farm yields would rise by 20 to 30 percent, 100 to 150 million people would no longer go hungry, and carbon dioxide emissions could be reduced by 2.1 gigatons by 2050 through improved farm practices.[[17]](#footnote-18)
* Even though a third of women’s employment worldwide is in the agricultural sector, women represent only 12.6 percent of landowners. This lack of control over resources translates into women receiving only 10 percent of total aid for agriculture, forestry, and fishing. [[18]](#footnote-19)
* Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one sixth that among girls.[[19]](#footnote-20)
* The total number of girls married in childhood stands at 12 million per year.[[20]](#footnote-21)
* Only 55 countries have specific climate adaptation measures referring to gender equality and only 23 countries recognize women as agents of change in accelerating progress on climate commitments.[[21]](#footnote-22)
1. See : Mark West, Rebecca Kraut and Han Ei Chew. I’d blush if I could. EQUALS and UNESCO. Chapter 1 : Understanding the digital skills gender gap. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/women-science-not-silence-pioneering-change-global-climate-crisis> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> and <https://data.unwomen.org/features/why-we-need-gender-and-environment-data-agenda-cop28> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387867/PDF/387867eng.pdf.multi](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000387867/PDF/387867eng.pdf.multi) and <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future?hub=761> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/women-science-not-silence-pioneering-change-global-climate-crisis> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/women-science-not-silence-pioneering-change-global-climate-crisis> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. <https://education4resilience.iiep.unesco.org/resources/2021/education-girls-education-and-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2021/09/advancing-gender-equality-through-climate-action-COP26-trevelyan> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/climatechange/why-we-must-engage-adolescent-girls-climate-change-solutions> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/women-science-not-silence-pioneering-change-global-climate-crisis> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)