



CHILD
FRIENDLY
CITIES &
COMMUNITIES

unicef 
UNITED KINGDOM

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE NEW NORMAL

3. THE CLIMATE CRISIS

THE CHANGE

Restrictions brought in to tackle Covid-19 meant fewer car journeys and a slowdown of industrial activity in our cities and communities; both of which resulted in an unprecedented drop in CO2 emissions.

This sudden improvement in air quality offered a glimpse of what life could be like for children and young people in the UK: breathing clean air on their way to and from school; playing in car-free streets; and exploring their cities by foot or bike.

Throughout the pandemic, councils and their partners moved rapidly to reallocate road space and prioritise cycling and walking. Yet as the economy reopened, emissions returned to their upward trend.

NEW NORMAL

A UK COMMITTEE
FOR UNICEF
(UNICEF UK) SERIES
FOR COUNCILS AND
THEIR PARTNERS

THE CHALLENGE

It is often said, but worth repeating: climate change is the single greatest threat facing the world's children and young people.

The reduction in emissions seen during lockdown was circumstantial and temporary. It also came at the expense of huge human suffering. As the UK adapts to the new normal, the challenge for councils and their partners will be to take this vision of what is possible and transform it into an enduring reality.

Perhaps the most powerful way they can do so is by recognising the climate crisis as a child rights crisis: one that threatens children's very survival and infringes on every one of their rights. This reframing affords the climate crisis the urgency it deserves, unites communities around a common goal, and puts children front and centre of our efforts to maintain a liveable planet.



3. THE CLIMATE CRISIS



THE STARTING POINT: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



All children under 18 should enjoy all the rights set out in the UNCRC **without discrimination**, and efforts to tackle the climate crisis should remedy its disproportionate impact on marginalised groups.



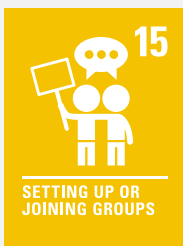
The **best interests of the child** should be the top priority in any decision made or action taken to address the climate crisis.



Every child should enjoy the **same opportunities to be healthy and grow** in environmental conditions that don't impact negatively on their development.



Every child has **the right to be heard and for their views to be taken seriously**, including on discussions around climate and the environment.



Every child has **the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly**, and restrictions should not be placed on climate strikes as long as they do not stop others from enjoying their rights.



Every child has **the right to the best possible health**, including a clean environment.



Children's **education** should help them to protect the environment.



Every child has **the right to rest and play** in a clean environment.

THE UNCRC

The full list of children's rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) can be found [here](#).



3. THE CLIMATE CRISIS



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Formally recognise children's right to a healthy environment in local Covid-19 recovery plans and climate change strategies. Position the climate crisis as a child rights crisis and use this message as a rallying call for action across local public, private, voluntary and community sectors.
- 2** Recognise children as key stakeholders in tackling the climate crisis by listening to and incorporating their views into local climate policies. Ensure that any opportunity to participate is promoted in an accessible and child-friendly way, proactively includes young people who may face barriers to participating, and that all decisions are communicated back to young people.
- 3** Celebrate and support children's right to peaceful assembly. Children and young people have courageously demanded action on climate change in recent years – through protests, online activism, and community and civic engagement – and should be given the political and logistical support they need to mobilise.
- 4** Support local solutions to local environmental challenges, particularly through offers of finance, mentoring and capacity building for innovative, youth-led projects.
- 5** Continue efforts to improve air quality through widening pavements, prioritising walkers and cyclists, building green spaces into local developments, and restricting through-traffic in residential and shopping streets. Work with children and young people to understand how they move around their neighbourhoods.
- 6** Campaign to make public transport free for all under 18s so that there are no costs for children when they travel to school, meet friends, or access leisure activities. Encouraging the use of public transport is key to reducing our car usage which has spiked as a result of the pandemic.



3. THE CLIMATE CRISIS



CASE STUDY

MADRID: FROM COUNCIL WASTE TO PLAYGROUNDS

In Madrid, Spain, an architectural and artist collective called [Basurama](#), researched the city's waste management system and found the council was storing a huge amount of waste that had come to the end of its life (lamp posts, publicity boards etc.), but was difficult to recycle.

Basurama's RE-LABs project worked with the council to change its waste management protocols from recycling to repair and reuse. The stored materials were then taken and used to co-design and build playgrounds in local schools.

Children were involved not only in the design of the playgrounds, but in their very construction, which means they are now skilled in maintaining and repairing their own playground equipment.

[Watch a video](#) to see how the project is supporting children's right to play in clean, green, and sustainable public spaces.

[Madrid has been recognised as a Child Friendly City by UNICEF Spain. You can find out more about the UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities programme \[here\]\(#\).](#)

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- [The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: Introducing the children's climate risk index](#): UNICEF's first comprehensive analysis of climate risk from a child's perspective
- [Children's rights and the environment: Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur](#): A child-friendly version of the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment
- ["Will climate change affect children's rights?": UNICEF UK and VotesforSchools survey of 46,000 children ahead of COP26](#)
- [Child rights impact assessment](#): Child Friendly Cities & Communities guidance on how to assess and mitigate the impact of local climate change programmes and policies on children's rights

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This document is one in a series of recommendations for councils and their partners published monthly by the UNICEF UK Child Friendly Cities & Communities team.

Continue the series: unicef.org.uk/child-friendly-cities/new-normal

