

World Children's Day and the climate crisis:

"We have a moral obligation to ensure that the trillions of dollars for COVID-19 recovery – money that we are borrowing from future generations – does not leave them burdened by a mountain of debt on a broken planet." António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General.

This World Children's Day, 20 November, we recognise the devastating and disproportionate impact the climate crisis is having and will continue to have on children. As the most anticipated event of the year, COP26, finishes, it remains clear we have never needed more urgent action from government, business and society to respond to the climate crisis. As such, we believe that World Children's Day, the day on which we celebrate the adoption of the Declaration and Convention on Children's Rights by the UN General Assembly, is the perfect opportunity to emphasise the impact of climate change on children's rights,

The climate crisis is also creating a child's rights crisis. Children across the world have inherited a problem that is not of their making. On top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic has created even further challenges and impacts on children. It is creating a water crisis, a health crisis, an education crisis, a protection crisis and a participation crisis. It is threatening children's very survival. In all these ways, it is infringing on children's rights.

The unfairness of this entire problem is that children bear the greatest burden of impacts of climate change, but contribute least to the cause of the problem.

Exacerbating this is the fact that children do not experience the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation the same way as an adult. This is because they are more vulnerable to extreme weather, droughts and floods. They are more vulnerable to toxic environmental hazards and stresses. They are more susceptible to diseases that will proliferate with climate change such as malaria and dengue.

It is also clear that the failure to address climate change head-on will only exacerbate inequality. **By 2050, the cumulative damage from climate change is expected to reach US\$8 trillion, impoverishing the world as a whole by 3% of GDP** – with inevitable and tragic effects on the future for the next generation.

Conversely, lowering the risk of exposure to extreme weather events will have a critical impact on children's access to basic services. More children will be able to remain in school, increases in malnutrition rates will be avoided, and ultimately, the lives and futures of many of the world's most vulnerable children will be saved. Investments that improve access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services, improve educational outcomes, improve access to health services and improve access to social protection for children can considerably reduce overall climate risk for hundreds of millions of children.

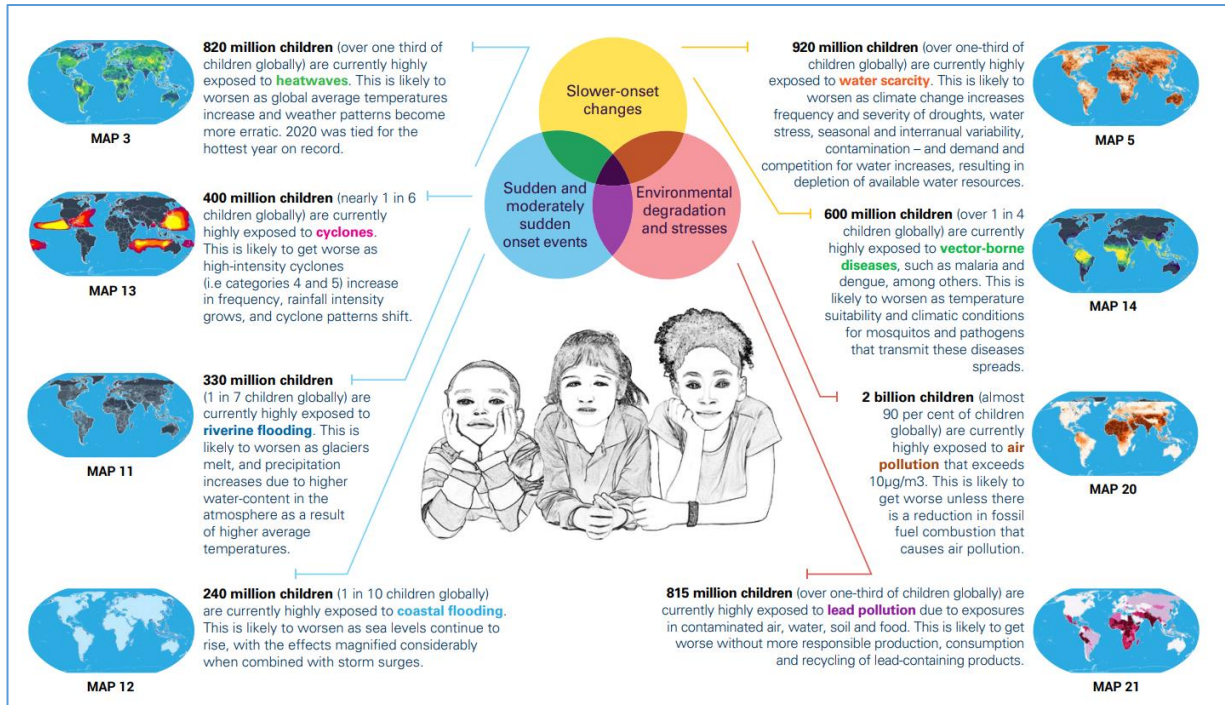
Additionally, as investors, we recognise that children are key stakeholders for business, as they represent the future workforce, consumers and community members. As such, we firmly believe that businesses cannot be sustainable if they do not address their impact on children.

This emerging crisis for children has been clearly shown in two recent and important reports – **Save the Children's 'Born into the Climate Crisis'** and **UNICEF's 'The climate crisis is a child rights crisis'**. Both UNICEF and Save the Children call on recognising children as equal stakeholders and key agents of change in addressing this crisis

UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index has revealed that **1 billion children are at 'extremely high risk' of the impacts of climate change. That is nearly half of all children.** This index provides new global evidence on how many children are currently exposed to a variety of climate and environmental

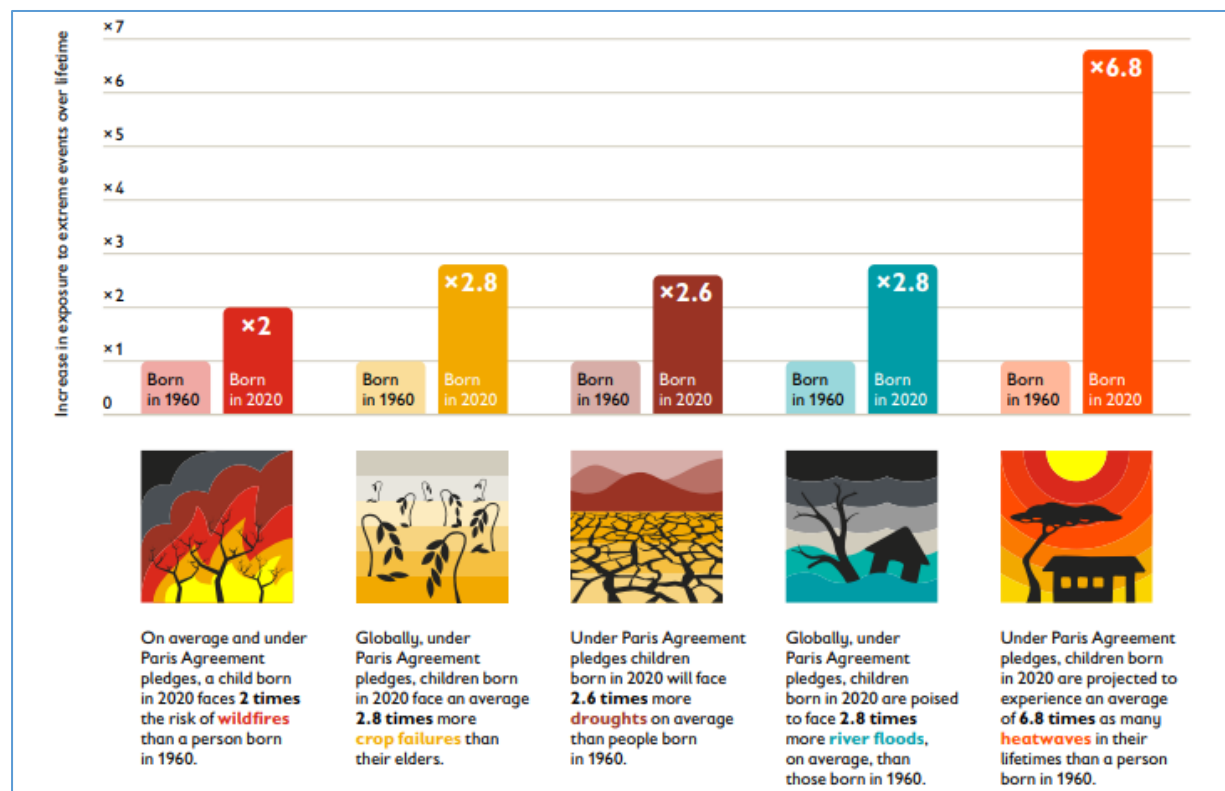
hazards, shocks and stresses. Figure 1, illustrates the hundreds of millions of children who are living with these extreme climatic events.

Figure 1:



Save the Children similarly released modelling that illustrates the increased risk that children today face to different climatic events (Figure 2). **Children worldwide will experience up to 24 times more extreme weather events in their lifetimes compared to someone born in the 1960s.**

Figure 2:



Importantly, both UNICEF and Save the Children call on recognising children as equal stakeholders and key agents of change in addressing this crisis. It is clear that children are not blind to these impacts, and their activism has never been more prominent – or needed. A recent study found that **three quarters of children surveyed globally considered the future frightening, while a lack of action by governments and industry left 45% experiencing climate anxiety and distress** that affected their daily lives.

This was further evident in the Pre-COP26 Youth Summit. For the first time in the history of UN climate negotiations, 400 young people convened to make an urgent plea to governments to do all they can to slow warming and delivered a draft recommendation document. This included:

- Calling on all levels of government to take specific steps to involve young people in meaningful action on climate change.
- Pushing for net-zero emissions by 2030.
- The need for nature-based solutions to preserve biodiversity and help adapt to climate change.
- Requesting safeguards to ensure solutions don't disrespect ecosystems and local communities.
- Transformations in entrepreneurship, sports, fashion, the arts and academia for leaders to use their platforms to inspire young people to live more sustainably and for the industries to shift production to low climate impact.

Ella, 14, was Australia's Youth Delegate for the conference and conveys how the climate crisis is a child rights crisis: *"While adults in power ignore the issue, it is young people who have to take action. We are rallying to make a point that this isn't something we can delay action on. I feel proud to be one of many young people around the world who are fighting for justice hand-in-hand. But we shouldn't have to be doing this. We shouldn't have the responsibility of the future of the world on our shoulders. It is key that our leaders hear and listen to us, because we have the most to lose from this crisis. It is imperative that children are present at this critical juncture - not as inspiration, but as rights-holders, as the most acutely-affected, and as agents of urgent, necessary, and transformative change."*

These children desperately need our support in protecting their future, and as investors, companies, parents and concerned adults, we must all sit up and listen to them. Ethical Partners has been engaging with multiple companies recently as part of our upcoming research with UNICEF Australia about the importance of considering and actively listening to children as stakeholders, as well as considering the unique vulnerabilities of children to climate change. We look forward to continuing these engagements over time.

Ethical Partners also continue to strongly believe that the world needs companies to move more rapidly to address the accelerating global issues facing all of humanity today, and aim to address this through our investments, our engagements and our wider advocacy. As investors, we know we have a crucial role to play to call on governments to do more to address the climate crisis, to encourage business to speed up their progress on reducing emissions, and to ensure that all stakeholders, including children are part of decisions that impact their livelihoods.

In 2015 the world made a promise to leave no one behind by setting the SDGs. But without urgent action to reduce our impact on the environment, entire generations of children are at risk of being left behind as their planet is reshaped by climate change. ***It's crunch time for our children, and their children, now.***

Robyn Parkin and Georgina Murray

Resources:

<https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/born-into-the-climate-crisis.pdf>