

Influencing Global Climate Adaptation and Gender Policy—From Baku to Bonn, Belém, Bangkok and Beyond

May 2026



Summary

Young Lives' [unique longitudinal evidence](#) on the long-term and intergenerational impacts of early exposure to climate shocks on children and young people's development—and how they can be mitigated—is driving ongoing collaborative work with UNICEF and Save the Children to ensure that the needs and vulnerabilities of children and youth are central in global climate adaptation policy.

The adoption of a new set of indicators to help accelerate and measure progress towards the Global Goal on Adaption (GGA) was one of the key items on the international climate policy agenda in 2025. In the months ahead of COP30 in Belém, Brazil, in November 2025, Young Lives, UNICEF and Save the Children prepared a series of joint policy briefs recommending specific GGA indicators to track progress on child health, nutrition, education and social protection. These recommendations were disseminated to government delegates at decisive moments during the negotiation process, including at COP30 itself, and were reflected in the child and education-focused positions of several countries.

This joint action helped keep children at the forefront of delegates' minds during the complex GGA negotiations, resulting in several references to children and youth, as well as calls for age-disaggregated data, in the final decision adopted in Belém. As the GGA moves into its operationalisation phase, the collaboration continues. In February 2026, Young Lives, UNICEF and Save the Children responded to a COP30 Call for Submissions with a set of practical proposals to translate the newly adopted indicators into climate action that addresses the needs of children and young people.

Young Lives also regularly disseminates policy-relevant evidence on how social protection can help to remediate and protect against the negative effects of climate shocks, emphasising its important role in reducing the unequal impacts on adolescent girls and young women that can leave them significantly disadvantaged in education and job opportunities. This included contributing longitudinal data to inform the development of the new Gender Action Plan adopted at COP30.

The Young Lives Study

[Young Lives](#) is an innovative mixed-methods longitudinal study following the lives of 12,000 young people, from infancy into adulthood, across four countries—Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam—since 2001, delivering significant research to policy impact. In 2025, Young Lives launched a new [Research Hub on Climate Change and Environmental Shocks](#) to generate ground-breaking, policy relevant evidence on the long-term effects on human development across the life course.

Children are uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change

Children are disproportionately susceptible to climate change impacts due to their distinct physiology and developmental needs. Without significant action, the effects of climate change threaten to reverse progress made towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at ending child poverty, hunger and inequality.

According to UNICEF's [A Threat to Progress](#) report, almost every aspect of child health and well-being is affected by climate change, while nearly a quarter of a billion children's schooling [was disrupted by climate change in 2024](#). Save the Children's 2025 [Born Into the Climate Crisis 2](#) report emphasises the urgent need for child-responsive climate strategies to safeguard children's rights and well-being, including adaptations to address the impacts, losses and damages that children are already facing due to unprecedented exposure to climate extremes.

Young Lives' ground-breaking evidence shows that early exposure to climate shocks—including in the gestational period—has a profound and unequal impact on children's long-term development, affecting nutrition, physical growth, foundational cognitive skills, learning progress and access to education, with children growing up in the poorest households being the most affected. The data has even shown that these impacts can extend to the next generation: droughts or flooding experienced by a woman while pregnant can have adverse effects on her child's vocabulary by age 5, with longer-term effects on their basic maths and social and emotional skills persisting into adolescence.

But these impacts are neither inevitable nor irreversible

Crucially, Young Lives' evidence also shows that these impacts are neither irreversible nor inevitable. Public policies such as social protection programmes can mitigate the negative effects of climate shocks and poverty, supporting children and young people on the frontline of climate change.

This has powerful implications for global and national climate policy, particularly in relation to Article 7 of the Paris Agreement—the [Global Goal on Adaptation \(GGA\)](#)—which aims to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change.



Young Lives Deputy Director Kath Ford at COP29, Baku, 2024

Young Lives influencing global climate adaptation negotiations

Following [Young Lives' participation at COP29](#) in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November 2024, the study has continued to prioritise global climate policy influencing, through collaborative engagement with FCDO and close partnerships with UNICEF and Save the Children, to advocate for greater emphasis on children and young people in key GGA negotiations.

This collaboration deepened in early 2025, due to shared concerns over inadequate references to the urgent need to address the acute impacts of climate change on child health, nutrition and education within the indicators being developed to track progress towards the GGA, due to be adopted at COP30 in November 2025.

Ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany, in June 2025, Young Lives and Save the Children prepared a joint Policy Brief outlining recommendations for child-sensitive and child-specific GGA indicators. This included suggested text for indicators related to health, water and sanitation, poverty and education, focusing on the specific vulnerabilities and needs of children and young people.

Young Lives Policy Officer, Fiona Curtin, attended the Bonn conference and worked with Save the Children colleagues to share these recommendations with State Parties, including FCDO and other members of the UK delegation in Bonn. During numerous rounds of negotiations, Young Lives, Save the Children and UNICEF distributed further joint recommendations responding to evolving draft negotiating texts, and were very encouraged to hear several Parties, including the UK and the EU, thereafter calling for children to be prioritised.



Young Lives Policy Officer Fiona Curtin and Senior Advocacy Manager Global Health, Save the Children Germany, Patricia Kramarz at the Bonn Climate Conference, 2025.

Young Lives' collaboration directly informing UNFCCC negotiations in Bonn, June 2025

Young Lives' joint engagement with UNICEF and Save the Children played a pivotal role in securing the important mandate delivered in the [final GGA text](#) agreed at Bonn, which called for "indicators that reflect the unique vulnerabilities of children to climate change impacts across the thematic targets and, potentially, cross-cutting indicators related to education and the health of children and young people".

Camilla Pankhurst (FCDO Education Advisor, Climate & Environment) confirmed Young Lives' key role in encouraging Parties to highlight the importance of children and education, writing:

“I'm so pleased with how this collaboration went! Thanks again for your work with UNICEF and Save the Children—it made a big difference, and I know your analysis provided HMG with a strong foundation to advocate for better representation of children and education within the GGA indicators.”



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Collaborating for a positive outcome for children and youth at COP30

To ensure that the mandate agreed at Bonn was not sidelined during the complex task of preparing a set of 100 indicators for adoption in Belém, **Young Lives, UNICEF and Save the Children produced three more joint policy briefs** in the run-up to COP30 in November 2025. The first targeted the 43 international experts charged with developing the indicators; the second was shared with government delegates ahead of a workshop to finalise the proposed indicators; and the third—this time also in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and YOUNGO, the official children and youth constituency of the UNFCCC—was distributed to State Parties and key negotiators at the start of COP30, recommending ways to address gaps on child health, nutrition and education in the indicator framework and [ensure a meaningful outcome for children](#).

The GGA negotiations were among the most difficult and contentious at COP30, reflecting deep international divisions over the desired outcome. Young Lives followed the discussions as a virtual participant and liaised closely with colleagues from UNICEF, Save the Children, YOUNGO and others on the ground in Belém to continue advocating for the inclusion of strong GGA indicators for children and young people. As in Bonn, joint recommendations were distributed following the release of draft decision texts, with specific suggestions to strengthen references to vulnerable children and young people.

Although the final GGA indicators decision was less robust than hoped, several Party Groups and individual Parties highlighted the importance of incorporating cross-cutting considerations, including children and youth, and disaggregating indicators by age, gender and other factors, which was ultimately reflected in the final [decision text](#).

As the implementation of the GGA moves forward, it is critical to ensure that the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of children and young people remain central. Young Lives is continuing to collaborate with UNICEF and Save the Children to present joint recommendations aimed at translating the newly adopted GGA indicators and Belém-Addis Vision on Adaptation into child-responsive climate action. This includes a [joint Policy Brief](#), published in February 2026 in response to a Call for Submissions issued at COP30, which sets out recommended priority areas to advance child-focused climate action and ensure that States leverage the best available child-centred data and tools when operationalising the Baku Adaptation Roadmap and the Belém-Addis Vision launched at COP30.

Young Lives' informing gender-responsive climate and social protection policy

Young Lives also continues to emphasise the connections between climate change, the health and well-being of adolescent girls, and women's economic empowerment in global policy debates, including through a recent [Policy Brief](#) and a [Submission to the UNFCCC](#) on the development of the new Gender Action Plan in March 2025—one of the first times a formal submission directly from the University of Oxford has been included as part of the UNFCCC process.

The Submission stressed the importance of the Gender Action Plan being informed by robust longitudinal data and presents Young Lives' findings on the distinct vulnerabilities of adolescent girls, gender-related intergenerational impacts of climate change, effects on women and girls' mental health, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care that falls on women and girls during shocks and crises. It also includes evidence that gender bias and inequalities affect women and girls' likelihood of studying engineering and other STEM subjects, impacting their job choices and earning expectations and putting them at a disadvantage in accessing green jobs.

The Belém Gender Action Plan (2026-34) adopted at COP30 is designed to drive sustained, long-term gender-responsive climate policy and action. It raises global ambitions to enhance gender equality and the just transition of the workforce through the creation of decent work and quality jobs for women and men. The plan presents concrete actions to strengthen the evidence base for gender-responsive climate policies, including in relation to care work, health, and violence against women and girls. Young

Lives has welcomed the new Gender Action Plan and is continuing to encourage effective, evidence-based gender-responsive climate policies that take a proactive, targeted approach to women's economic empowerment, education and employment opportunities in the context of climate change and the just transition.

In February 2026, Young Lives was invited to participate at the [Global Symposium on Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Social Protection](#) in Bangkok, organised by UNICEF in partnership with DFAT and FCDO. Young Lives co-led a Skills Lab on Climate Change, alongside representatives of the Government of Ethiopia and Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP), and presented the study's unique longitudinal evidence on the power of social protection to mitigate the effects of early exposure to climate shocks, with a particular focus on the need to target vulnerable adolescent girls and young women.

This event was the latest in a series of collaborations between Young Lives and UNICEF's FCDO-funded [Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection](#) (GRASSP) research programme. This included Young Lives' partnership with UNICEF and FCDO as part of the "We Deserve Better" campaign to promote gender-responsive social protection at [CSW-68 in New York](#) in March 2024, where Young Lives' findings were showcased in a dedicated [photo exhibition](#).



Young Lives Deputy Director Kath Ford (left) at CSW-68, New York, 2024

The Global Symposium in Bangkok was a key opportunity to share Young Lives ground-breaking research in Ethiopia and Peru, showing for the first time that [social protection can reverse the negative effects of early poverty and climate shocks](#) on children's foundational cognitive skills—the building blocks for life-long learning, such as long-term memory and the ability to concentrate on a specific task, which are critical for educational success and future employment opportunities.

Young Lives' evidence helped inspire a lively interactive Climate Skills Lab, where representatives from several governments, donors, research institutes and international organisations proposed concrete ways to make social protection more effective at reducing the vulnerabilities to climate shocks of women, girls and people from the most at-risk communities.



Participants, including Young Lives Policy Officer Fiona Curtin (back row), at the Gender Responsive and Inclusive Social Protection Global Symposium, Bangkok, 2026

Looking forward

As a key component of its vision to 2030, Young Lives launched a new [Research Hub on Climate Change and Environmental Shocks](#) in 2025, as part of the University of Oxford's Global Climate Summit 'Right Here Right Now'.

The Hub aims to link Young Lives' treasure-trove of longitudinal cohort data with climate and environmental data sets, enabling powerful new research on how life-course exposure to climate shocks—including extreme weather events, rising temperatures and worsening air pollution—impacts young people's development and well-being.

This research has the potential to re-frame global debates by highlighting the long-term, intergenerational and intersecting impacts of climate change, environmental shocks and pollution in low- and medium-income countries, with important policy implications for improving young people's lives and meeting the SDGs.

The goals of the Hub are to inform climate adaptation and SDG-related policies and strategies; drive climate action through locally grounded, data-driven insights; and build capacity to empower the next generations of researchers in the Global South.



Young Lives Director Marta Favara speaking at the launch of the Young Lives Research Hub on Climate Change and Environmental Shocks, June 2025

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