Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2415 (2022)[1]

Inaction on climate change – A violation of children's rights

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The climate crisis is threatening the future of humanity and is already hitting the most vulnerable particularly hard. As extreme climatic events become more frequent, intense and devastating, 2.2 billion children worldwide are increasingly deprived of their fundamental rights, including the rights to health, food, water, shelter and quality education. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), nearly 1 billion children live in areas exposed to an extremely high risk of impact from climate change and environmental degradation, which could kill 250 000 children additionally each year between now and 2100.

2. The lack of effective action to tackle climate change constitutes a violation of children's rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This concerns, in particular, the right to life, development, health, medical care, care and education, a good standard of living, information, protection and assistance.

3. While all Council of Europe member States have ratified both the UNCRC and the Paris Agreement on climate change, they face considerable challenges in the implementation of these texts. Air pollution, in particular, is an omnipresent, massive and constant threat to children's health that stems largely from human activities and greenhouse gas emissions, which also contribute to climate change. The world's children are anxious about the prospect of deadly global warming and demand to be associated with action against climate change. They are concerned with the lack, or slow pace, of progress as regards the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 13 on the fight against climate change, which requires wide-ranging changes in policies and society's way of life.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly appreciates the readiness of the world's children to be actors of change and transformation in society. In this context, it recalls its Resolution 2396 (2021) and Recommendation 2211 (2021) "Anchoring the right to a healthy environment: need for enhanced action by the Council of Europe" and stresses the need for member States to shoulder their shared responsibility and act in concert to advance a new generation of rights in order to better safeguard the well-being of both current and future generations. Unless they do so, member States will continue to be subjected to environmental litigation by today's children and young people who seek climate justice, and rightly so.

5. The Assembly acknowledges a widespread and deep-seated existential angst – eco-anxiety – among children, which is driven by a sense of helplessness and disappointment with adults' failure to tackle climate change more decisively and earlier. It believes that society should listen to children more carefully and involve them in the preparation of policies and measures to combat climate change at every level of governance. The Assembly underscores the special role schools and education systems play in informing children about ecological challenges and equipping them with tools for civic and pro-climate action. However, the responsibility to act to fight climate change lies with adults, not children.

6. The Assembly welcomes the decision of the United Nations Human Rights Council recognising the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a fundamental human right. It also hails the ruling of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child establishing that a State Party to the UNCRC can be

1. *Assembly debate* on 24 January 2022 (2nd sitting) (see Doc. 15436, report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Ms Jennifer De Temmerman). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 24 January 2022 (2nd sitting).
See also Recommendation 2219 (2022).

held responsible for the harmful effects of its carbon emissions on the rights of children on its territory and beyond, thus effectively highlighting States' individual and shared responsibility for climate action and better protection of children's best interests.

7. To meet children's desire for participation in decision making, the Assembly commits to dialogue with children on climate action and protection of the environment, including via the outreach activities of its parliamentary network on the topic, which is being launched in early 2022. The Assembly shall also seek to foster children's participation in democratic debates on climate change at international and European level and via national, regional and local parliamentary activities. The aim is to replace the current sense of intergenerational distrust with a spirit of co-operation that would open the door to including children in other debates of relevance to them in a meaningful way, as suggested also in Resolution 2414 (2022) "The right to be heard – Child participation: a foundation for democratic societies".

8. The Assembly is convinced that, in the fight against climate change, the challenge of preserving a viable environment must be combined with the need to uphold the human rights of all generations. In order to ensure a sustainable future for the world's children, it therefore puts forward the following recommendations, based on its own work and consultations with children, to member States, urging them to:

8.1. honour their international commitments to combat climate change and implement the rights of the child as set out in the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the UNCRC;

8.2. work together towards anchoring the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment through national, European and international legal instruments according to the proposals contained in Assembly Resolution 2396 (2021) and Recommendation 2211 (2021) "Anchoring the right to a healthy environment: need for enhanced action by the Council of Europe" and Resolution 2399 (2021) and Recommendation 2214 (2021) "The climate crisis and the rule of law", in order to establish transgenerational responsibility for the preservation of the environment and new remedies for children;

8.3. collaborate with a view to establishing an international legal status for environmental refugees and protecting the victims of forced migration due to climate change and environmental degradation, in particular children;

8.4. keep the promises of financial assistance and sharing of their knowledge (technical and technological) with regard to the poorest and most climate-vulnerable countries to help them adapt to climate change, reduce its adverse effects on children and cope with the ecological crisis;

8.5. strengthen international co-operation in the protection of the rights of the child and of future generations and encourage the contribution of civil society organisations and businesses in order to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change on young populations;

8.6. take immediate action in the face of the climate crisis, according to national capacities, in the interest of the rights of the child and of future generations, including by systematically assessing the impact of relevant legislation and policies on children and future generations in terms of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment;

8.7. give priority to climate change adaptation policies favouring the resilience of children to climate change and initiatives to improve the quality of life and health of children, notably via the development of resilient and green infrastructures in schools, a sustainable energy supply, the establishment of "zero emissions" zones around childcare centres and schools, the obligation to use short supply routes for food products and the promotion of "good for the planet" meals in schools;

8.8. take strong measures to reduce the exposure of children to air pollution in accordance with Resolution 2286 (2019) "Air pollution: a challenge for public health in Europe";

8.9. recognise children as agents of change in the climate crisis through a top-down and bottom-up approach by involving children in decision making and promoting children's participation through the establishment of consultation mechanisms (advocacy, exchange platforms, etc.);

8.10. guarantee the right of children to be heard by promoting the lowering and alignment of the legal voting age;

8.11. strengthen children's right to information and education in environmental matters in order to enable them to understand the challenges of the ecological crisis and climate change and to equip them with tools, knowledge and skills enabling their participation in the ecological transition and making them more aware of the need to respect nature, living creatures and the Earth;

8.12. continue this educational effort towards ecological problem solving in all higher education training courses (professional and university, all sectors combined) in order to equip young citizens with the know-how and “green conscience” to allow them to make enlightened and intelligent choices, especially in terms of consumption.

9. The Assembly asks national parliaments to use their existing child participation and consultation mechanisms or to set up new ones, as appropriate, in order to ensure that children can contribute meaningfully to the drafting of policies and legislation so as to mainstream climate change action throughout various sectors. It resolves to involve children in its work relating to climate change and environmental challenges, including through the committees concerned, in conformity with its Resolution 2414 (2022). It also welcomes the reflection initiated by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy on the participation of young people in the work of the Assembly. Finally, the Assembly encourages national parliaments to support and facilitate children’s participation in the European Climate Pact, an initiative of the European Union.