

NAVIGATING MEGATRENDS: The ICPD Programme of Action for a Sustainable Future



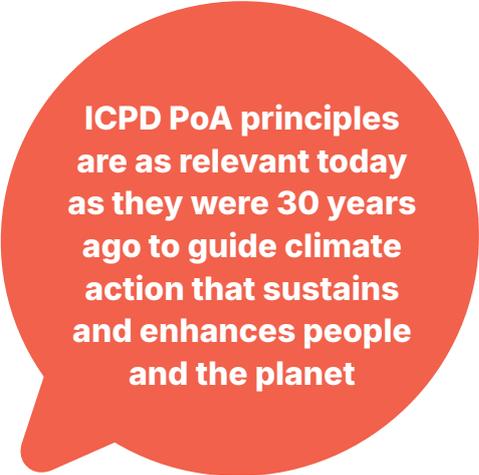
ICPD and Climate Action

The Programme of Action and international agreements on climate change share strong commitments to human rights and to broad-based, equitable and sustainable development

In mid-2024, UNFPA issued five think pieces to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the landmark 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Under the framing of *Navigating Megatrends: The ICPD Programme of Action for a Sustainable Future*, the five think pieces are titled:

- ▶ Demographic Change and Sustainability
- ▶ The Future of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- ▶ The Future of Population Data
- ▶ **ICPD and Climate Action**
- ▶ A Safe Digital Future

The think pieces explore ways to sustain, refresh and accelerate ICPD commitments and the Programme of Action in a world of radical transformation. Designed for policymakers, they reflect on progress and highlight likely future scenarios. They offer starting points for discussion on what's next for population, development and sexual and reproductive health and rights.



ICPD PoA principles are as relevant today as they were 30 years ago to guide climate action that sustains and enhances people and the planet

This short summary highlights key findings and recommended actions from the think piece on the ICPD and climate action. It suggests that the ICPD PoA principles are as relevant today as they were 30 years ago to guide climate action that sustains and enhances people and the planet.

Introduction

The climate crisis is an existential threat to humanity and the human-centred, sustainable development envisioned in the PoA of the 1994 ICPD. Climate intersects with a number of global megatrends with implications for population and development. Climate change threatens access to safe water, food and education, and worsens health vulnerabilities, particularly for women, adolescent girls and older persons. Climate anxiety is negatively affecting the hopefulness of youth. A failure to realize sexual and reproductive health and rights can hamper the ability of women and girls to engage in climate action, and undercuts their resilience to climate-induced disruptions.

The PoA and international agreements on climate change share strong commitments to human rights and to broad-based, equitable and sustainable development. Realizing these promises, including for gender equality and youth empowerment, is fundamental to securing shared action on climate response and addressing climate injustice.

Key insights

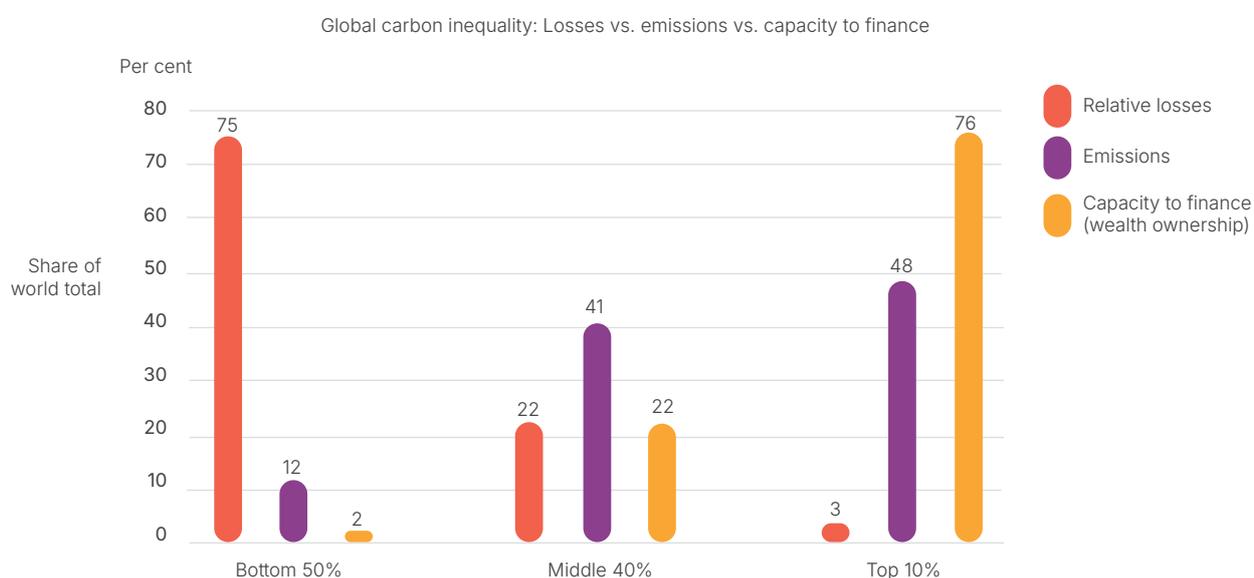
Climate change magnifies injustice in human societies. Countries in Europe and North America have created half of all accumulated global greenhouse gas emissions since 1850, contributing as much to climate change as all other countries combined. The richest 1 per cent of people accounts for more than 15 per cent of cumulative carbon emissions, while the poorest 50 per cent accounts for just 7 per cent. Yet the poorest countries, and the poorest people in all countries, are most threatened by the climate crisis, facing the largest economic costs and losses and risks to their survival. Figure 1 illustrates how shares of climate-related economic losses, emissions and capacities to finance recovery from climate impacts differ among the poorest 50 per cent of countries, the middle 40 per cent and the wealthiest 10 per cent.

An important consequence of climate change is the well-documented evidence that younger people across countries bear a greater sense of pessimism and anxiety about the climate crisis than older people. Youth recognize that they will live their lives in a world experiencing unprecedented and frightening climate threats. Despite their climate activism, many young people lack the resources to adapt and bolster their resilience. Climate anxiety dims their view of the future, to the point that some report it is negatively influencing their plans for childbearing.

The ICPD PoA is underpinned by the principles of equality, universal human rights and non-discrimination. It states that “the right to development is universal and inalienable” and must be “fulfilled to equitably address the population, development, and environmental needs of both present and future generations” (Principle 3). Further, “all countries must acknowledge their common yet differentiated responsibilities” (Principle 15). These principles have direct implications for climate action, as noted in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. They call for high-income countries

▶ FIGURE 1

Differences between countries in the share of climate-related economic losses, emissions and capacity to finance recovery from climate impacts



Source: Adapted from World Inequality Lab: *Climate Inequality Report 2023* (p. 89).

to support climate action in the many low and middle-income countries (LMICs) that contributed little to the crisis but are bearing the greatest burden, and for all countries to collectively address unequal vulnerabilities within countries based on age, disability, gender, geography, access to information, social networks, wealth and more. These principles offer benchmarks to create collective and shared climate actions that could pull the world back from the brink of escalating irreversible change.

Climate intersects with a number of global megatrends with implications for population and development. The consequences of climate-related disasters, for example, include an upsurge in internal displacement and both internal and international migration. While the majority of displaced persons remain in their own countries, others are forced to cross borders. International law has yet to recognize “climate refugees”, limiting rights and recourse for what is likely to be an ever-growing number of people.



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Another important global trend involves historically high rates of urbanization. Cities can and must have major roles in reducing emissions and adapting to climate change. Mayors and local leaders worldwide are already forerunners in demonstrating the potential for integrating climate resilience and human-centred design in urban planning and development.

The climate crisis poses multiple potential threats to reproductive health and rights, including lower fertility aspirations; greater difficulty in conceiving; pregnancy risks, including miscarriage; and, in acute crises, reduced access to safe delivery and related sexual and reproductive health services. In damaging

natural environments and the livelihoods and communities that ecosystems sustain, climate change can deepen poverty, worsen gender-based violence and raise the risk of child marriage.

The crisis also compounds health and economic vulnerabilities for older persons and persons with disabilities. Older people have greater physical vulnerabilities to heat exposure, and both they and people with disabilities face more significant obstacles when climate events demand urgent relocation or evacuation.

Population data in the context of climate change are crucial for disaster preparedness and humanitarian response. Geospatial data that indicate the locations of persons with climate-vulnerability (e.g., census data with age, poverty and disability status by the geographic coordinates of dwelling units, health facilities, etc.) can allow better preparedness for climate shocks, along with shorter response times to provide immediate aid during climate crises. Integrating different types of geo-referenced data



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facilitates delivering relief to those persons affected by climate disasters and increases their access to essential services.

In addressing the climate crisis, the ICPD PoA is more relevant than ever. Its principles and recommended actions underscore the importance of a shared global response to the inequalities and injustices laid bare by the climate crisis, and by the vulnerabilities of countries and populations that contributed least but are impacted most by the current crisis.

Recommended actions

It is important for all actors to recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights as fundamental to climate adaptation and resilience. Growing evidence of the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls underlines the need to ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights and women's empowerment are integral to climate responses, including through the protection of essential reproductive health services during climate-induced disruptions and the representation of women in climate decision-making. Other priorities entail addressing the risks of gender-based violence and early, forced and child marriage in households and communities that are undergoing a progressive erosion of livelihoods due to the climate crisis.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are fundamental to climate adaptation and resilience

Governments, the international community and all key actors should accelerate progress in strengthening health systems, adopting universal health coverage and creating climate-resilient health and social protection systems. All these elements are part of managing growing climate impacts on global health, and acknowledging the uniquely negative effects of increased heat and



Managing climate impacts on global health includes acknowledging the negative effects of increased heat and other climate changes on healthy pregnancies and on the well-being of older persons

other climate changes on healthy pregnancies and on the well-being of older persons.

Countries are encouraged to embed the perspectives of young people in climate governance and include them in decision-making. Governments and development institutions are encouraged to promote research to better understand what the climate crisis means for young people. They could promote studies that explore implications of the climate crisis on people's confidence in the future, economic prospects, fertility and family aspirations, and long-term health, including mental health. New insights are needed on gender inequality and how it affects resilience and abilities to cope, and on how young men and young women may experience the climate crisis in different ways.

At the twenty-seventh conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, governments agreed to create a new fund that would help particularly vulnerable developing countries to address loss and damage arising from climate change. This would support the resilience of populations confronting the most extreme effects of the climate crisis, but who contributed little to this global crisis.

Scaled-up investments in climate knowledge and adaptation will be best targeted if they build on geospatial maps of population and climate risk that locate areas and persons with climate vulnerability. Such projection-based scenarios can improve preparedness and shorten response systems during climate events. They can enable governments to prioritize climate-resilient housing, transport and related public infrastructure, including to protect older persons from climate risks.

With the global urban population expected to grow by an estimated 2.5 billion people by 2050,¹ investment in green urban planning is an essential component of climate action. Dense, walkable, public-friendly spaces increase safety and community accessibility, and reduce material consumption, pollution and emissions.

The increasing deterioration of habitable spaces and mounting numbers of displaced and relocated persons due to climate and environmental degradation underlines the need for policies to guide safe, orderly and regular migration. The historic agreement at the twenty-eighth conference of the parties to operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund recognized the inclusion of displacement and displaced persons in its scope. This will allow the fund to provide finance to support vulnerable developing countries to implement measures and policies related to displacement, including by enhancing evidence and addressing data gaps.

The deterioration of habitable spaces and mounting numbers of displaced persons due to climate and environmental degradation underlines the need for policies to guide safe, orderly and regular migration

Those experiencing a loss of home and habitat need support and services, including for sexual and reproductive health and rights, education and decent work in order to contribute to host countries.

Conference outcomes explicitly noted “the importance of transitioning to sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production in efforts to address climate change, including through circular economy approaches, and encourage efforts in this regard”. These efforts include reducing fossil fuels, advancing green energy, promoting agriculture and food systems that restore ecological diversity and feed people without causing environmental harm, and balancing the health of people and the planet, now and in the future.

Conclusion

In highlighting key findings and recommended actions on climate action, this brief has shown that the ICPD PoA principles are as relevant today as they were 30 years ago to guide climate action that sustains and advances people and the planet.

The world needs a shared global response to the inequalities and injustices laid bare by the climate crisis, and by the vulnerabilities of countries and populations that contributed little to the current crisis, but are suffering the most.

In light of the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on women and girls, governments are encouraged to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and women’s empowerment as integral to climate resilience by ensuring that essential health services are protected during climate-induced disruptions, ensuring that women are represented in climate decision-making, and mitigating the risks of gender-based violence in households and communities that are undergoing a progressive erosion of livelihoods due to the crisis.

Finally, governments are encouraged to recognize the deterioration of habitable spaces and the increasing numbers of displaced and relocated persons due to climate events, and to thereby adopt the Global Compact policies for safe, orderly and regular migration, and to assure the well-being of climate refugees.



The world needs a shared global response to the injustices laid bare by the climate crisis, and by the vulnerabilities of populations that contribute little to the crisis but suffer most

ENDNOTES

1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision*. ST/ESA/SER.A/420. New York: United Nations.

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