A DO-IT-YOURSELF KIT

Holding Governments to Account for Children in Climate Adaptation

A practical guide for NGOs and children's organisations to bring a communication to the UN Special Rapporteurs

JUST ACCESS e.V.

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About this Kit



Written for NGOs, children's organisations, clinicians and lawyers who want to act for children



Shows you how to challenge a Government's climate adaptation planning through the UN



Built from a real submission – you adapt it to your own country

In 2025, **Just Access** submitted a communication to **four UN Special Rapporteurs**, arguing that Germany was failing to take children into account in the way it prepares for climate change, and that this breaches children's rights. **This kit turns that submission into a template you can use in your own jurisdiction.**

International human rights bodies have now confirmed that a Government's failure to put in place timely and adequate adaptation measures can itself violate human rights. The **UN Human Rights Committee** said so in the Torres Strait Islanders case, and the European Court of Human Rights has confirmed that States must back their emission cuts with adaptation measures (*KlimaSeniorinnen v Switzerland*). Children have a particularly strong claim, yet they are almost always left out of adaptation planning.

Important things to know

- This kit explains one route (the UN Special Procedures), chosen because it is the most accessible for this kind of systemic claim.
- It is a first orientation, not a substitute for legal advice. Just Access can help (see the back cover).
- Every country's adaptation law, data and institutions differ. Treat the German example as a model to be re-researched for your context.
- The law in this area is developing quickly. Check the linked sources for the latest position before you file.

Why this matters

Today's children did least to cause climate change, but they will live with its effects the longest. Their bodies are more vulnerable to heat, air pollution and disease. Their mental health is more exposed to climate distress, and they depend on the adults around them to keep them safe.



1.5 billion children worldwide are exposed to heatwaves that are becoming more frequent, longer-lasting or more severe (UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Report 2026).



Of 160 national adaptation policies studied, **only 5 (3%)** took substantial steps to include children (*The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 2024).

Governments are now legally required to prepare for climate change in a way that **respects human rights**. But adaptation plans routinely ignore children, creating a "postcode lottery" in which a child's protection depends on where they happen to live.

Just Access built this kit so that the argument we made for children in Germany can be made for children everywhere. **If even a handful of organisations replicate it, the pressure on Governments multiplies.**

The core legal idea: human rights apply to climate adaptation

States have long been asked to reduce emissions (mitigation). This complaint is about the other half of the picture: adapting to the climate change that is already happening, and doing so in a way that protects children. Five sources make the argument:

- **Failure to adapt can breach human rights.** In the Torres Strait Islanders case, the UN Human Rights Committee found that a State's failure to put in place timely and adequate adaptation measures violated the residents' rights to private and family life and to culture.
- **A European court has recognised the duty.** In *KlimaSeniorinnen v Switzerland*, the European Court of Human Rights held that States must supplement their emission cuts with adaptation measures to alleviate the most severe or imminent consequences of climate change, taking into account particular needs for protection.
- **Children have a dedicated standard.** The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in General Comment No. 26 (2023), says States should identify climate-related vulnerabilities among children and ensure national adaptation plans help children adapt.
- **Treaty law backs this up.** The Paris Agreement (Article 7) calls for adaptation planning that takes vulnerable people into account, and its preamble asks States to respect children's rights when acting on climate change. Under the ICESCR, as interpreted by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (General Comment No. 3), States must move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards fully realising economic and social rights, which we argue includes preparing for foreseeable climate impacts.
- **World and regional courts confirm it.** In 2025 the International Court of Justice and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights both confirmed that States' human rights obligations require them to address climate change, including through adaptation, with particular attention to children.

Why children, and why you can act

Why children are treated differently in law



Their developing bodies make them more vulnerable to heat, air pollution, UV radiation and infectious disease.

They are more exposed to climate anxiety and other mental-health effects.

Human rights standards demand that children be given priority and that their views be heard in decisions that affect them (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 3 and 12).

Because harm to children is often lower-threshold and lifelong, States owe them heightened protection.

Why your organisation can bring this complaint



Children cannot realistically navigate international mechanisms alone. NGOs, children's organisations and other third parties can act on their behalf.

The route in this kit lets you challenge a law, policy or planning failure affecting children generally – you do not need to name an individual child victim.

Where you do name or rely on an individual child, you must have their (and their guardian's) informed consent, and you must safeguard them (see the safety page).

UN Special Rapporteurs (Special Procedures)



Rights Covered

Ongoing or threatened human rights harm; and laws, policies or practices that violate international human rights standards, including climate adaptation that ignores children.

Key Deadlines

No strict deadline and no need to exhaust domestic remedies first.

Possible Outcomes

The experts may write jointly to the Government, seek answers and press for change. They cannot issue binding decisions or award compensation.

Geographical Scope

Global. The State does not need to have ratified any particular treaty for the experts to act.

Who Can Bring a Complaint?

- Individuals
- Groups
- NGOs and civil-society organisations
- National human rights bodies and others

Q Why this route for a children-and-adaptation complaint?

A Because it is the most accessible. There is no ratification requirement, no need to exhaust national courts, and it is designed to receive information about systemic problems. Several Rapporteurs can act together in a single joint communication.

Q Which experts do we write to?

A Choose the mandates that match the rights you rely on. Just Access wrote to four: climate change, the right to health, the right to education and the right to adequate housing.

Q How do we submit it?

A Through the official OHCHR online submission form for Special Procedures. Keep a copy of everything you send.

Is this kit right for your case?

This route fits best if most of the following are true:

Your Government has a climate adaptation strategy, law or action plan (or is legally required to make one) and it largely leaves children out.



Climate impacts affecting children (heat, floods, air pollution, disruption to schooling or housing) are already visible or clearly foreseeable in your country.



Children were not meaningfully consulted in the design of the plan.



You can point to concrete rights at stake, for example health, education or adequate housing.



You want international scrutiny and pressure on the Government.



If you need a binding judgment or a specific remedy for a named individual, a regional court or a UN treaty body may suit better. See our **International Mechanisms Toolkit**, and **contact Just Access**.

The process in seven steps

1. **Scope the problem.** Confirm your Government's adaptation planning ignores children, and pick the rights you will rely on.
2. **Build the evidence base.** Gather national climate data, the adaptation documents, and child-specific studies (see the evidence page).
3. **Choose your mandates.** Decide which Special Rapporteurs to address, based on the rights engaged.
4. **Draft the communication.** Follow the five-part structure (background → national failures → children → rights violations → requests).
5. **Footnote everything.** Every factual and legal statement needs a source, ideally a link to the most authoritative, most recent source.
6. **Submit and safeguard.** File through the OHCHR online form, protect anyone named, and flag any risk to the experts.
7. **Follow up.** Track the communications database, keep OHCHR updated, and consider publicising the submission.

How to structure the communication

The five parts of your submission

I

Background

Set out the climate science for your country and the two legal frameworks that apply: international environmental law (the Paris Agreement's duty to plan for adaptation, taking vulnerable people into account) and international human rights law (the independent duty to adapt in order to protect rights).

II

The State's adaptation efforts and their gaps

Describe the Government's adaptation law, strategy and action plans, then show the deficiencies: distant deadlines, patchy local uptake, and the near-absence of children.

III

Children and climate adaptation

Explain children's specific vulnerability, the legal need for child-specific measures (CRC General Comment No. 26), and the failure to hear children's voices in the planning.

IV

The rights violations

Take each right in turn (Just Access used health, education and housing) and show how the adaptation gap breaches it. Use the modular templates on the next pages.

V

Requests

Set out concrete 'asks' for the Rapporteurs to put to the Government.

Module A – The right to health

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (ICESCR, Article 12). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (General Comment No. 26) says States must address climate-related risks to children's health in their adaptation plans.

WHAT TO SHOW IN YOUR COUNTRY

- **Heat:** rising temperatures and heat-related illness in children, whether a national heat action plan exists, and whether it protects children.
- **Mental health:** climate anxiety and distress among young people, gaps in child mental-health services.
- **Other risks:** air pollution, UV radiation and allergies, and whether adaptation measures address them.
- **The tell-tale sign:** adaptation documents that offer only information leaflets instead of protective measures, effectively pushing responsibility onto children and families.

Module B – The right to education

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable (CESCR General Comment No. 13). It must prepare children to deal with the real challenges of their world, which now plainly includes climate change.

WHAT TO SHOW IN YOUR COUNTRY

- **School buildings and grounds:** are they adapted to heat, flooding and extreme weather? Are schools closing on hot days? (Freedom-of-information requests are useful here; see the evidence page.)
- **Curriculum:** does it teach climate adaptation (not only mitigation), and is that consistent across regions?
- **Playgrounds and outdoor space:** bare asphalt, no shade, no cooling, undermining both learning and the right to play.

Module C – The right to adequate housing

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Adequate housing must be habitable (protecting people from heat, cold, damp and other threats to health, as per CESCR General Comment No. 4), and disadvantaged groups, including children, should be given priority. The Special Rapporteur on housing has said that failing to take timely adaptation measures can violate the right to housing.

WHAT TO SHOW IN YOUR COUNTRY

- **Overheating homes:** homes that overheat in summer, slow or falling renovation rates, and building rules that let economic interests override adaptation.
- **The adaptation gap:** low-income families and their children are least able to afford adapted housing.
- **The urban environment:** heat islands, sealed surfaces, and a lack of shade, water and safe places to play near home.

Building your evidence base

WHAT EVIDENCE TO GATHER

- **Climate data:** temperature and extreme-weather trends and projections from your national meteorological service.
- **Government adaptation documents:** the national adaptation law, strategy and action plans, plus regional and local plans. A powerful, simple test: search the documents and count how many times “children” actually appears.
- **Child-specific research:** peer-reviewed studies and health-insurer or agency reports on how climate affects children in your country.
- **Participation and freedom of information:** evidence of whether children were consulted. Where official statistics are missing, use freedom-of-information requests. Just Access used one to establish that a German ministry keeps no data on heat-related school closures.

Writing your requests (the ‘asks’)

Your requests to the experts

End the communication by asking the Rapporteurs to urge the Government to act. Keep the asks concrete and tailored to your country. Just Access asked Germany to, among other things:

1. Review adaptation laws, policies and strategies so that children’s rights are prioritised and protected.
2. Adopt a children’s-rights-based approach, with meaningful participation of children and their representatives.
3. Use an intersectional model of vulnerability (including socio-economic disadvantage) when assessing children’s needs.
4. Adopt concrete health measures (including a national heat action plan sensitive to children) and prioritise children’s mental health.
5. Adapt schools and playgrounds, and add climate-adaptation education to the curriculum.
6. Reform building rules and fund energy-efficient renovation, prioritising families with children; embed children’s needs – including the right to play – in urban planning.

Treat these as a menu: keep what fits your jurisdiction, drop what does not, and add asks that respond to your own evidence.

Communication template

To: The UN Special Rapporteur(s) on [climate change] / [health] / [education] / [housing] / [add mandates]

From: [Your organisation], submitting on behalf of children in [country].

Summary: [In 3–4 sentences: what the Government is doing wrong on children and adaptation, and what you want.]

I. Background – [Climate science for your country + the two legal frameworks.]

II. The State's adaptation efforts and their deficiencies – [Describe the plans; show the gaps and the absence of children.]

III. Children and climate adaptation – [Children's vulnerability; the need for child-specific measures; the failure to hear children.]

IV. Rights violations – [Right 1] / [Right 2] / [Right 3], each with law + your national evidence.

V. Requests – [Your tailored asks.]

Footnotes – [A numbered list; each footnote is the link to your source.]

Reminder: try to keep it short, while still being complete.

Safety, consent and safeguarding

- **Identity and the State.** Your organisation's identity as the source is normally kept confidential. But the name of any individual victim you describe is normally shared with the Government. You can ask for victims' names to be left out of public reports. If naming anyone could put them at risk, keep the complaint systemic or explain the risk clearly.

- **No physical protection.** The UN experts cannot guarantee anyone's safety. Assess risk before you involve individuals.

- **Consent.** Where you name or rely on an individual (or their story), obtain informed consent and, for a child, the consent of their guardian. Without consent, the information will not be considered.

- **Safeguarding children.** Follow child-safeguarding good practice throughout: age-appropriate information, no exposure to harm, and a trusted adult involved. If in doubt, keep the complaint systemic (about the law and policy) rather than about a named child.

- **Keep records.** Save what you send and any correspondence, since you may need to follow up.

Tips, and what happens after you submit

Tips for a strong submission

- Keep it short and well summarised – long submissions are less likely to be acted on.
- Show why action is needed now.
- Consider compiling several examples to show a pattern.
- Source every claim; prefer official and recent sources.
- Use the online submission form and keep copies.

What happens next

- If the experts act, they may write jointly to the Government – an allegation letter or, in urgent cases, an urgent appeal – seeking answers and change.
- Communications and any State reply are usually published in the OHCHR communications database (generally after 60 days; policy-and-legislation communications even sooner), and reported to the Human Rights Council.
- There is no binding decision and no compensation. The power of this route is scrutiny and pressure.
- Keep OHCHR updated on developments, and follow up if you hear nothing.



You do not have to do this alone.

Just Access can provide free guidance and assistance to organisations preparing a communication for children on climate adaptation. Any organisation interested in collaborating, or wanting help to adapt this kit to their country, is warmly invited to get in touch.

contact@just-access.de

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