



'Children's differing experiences of environmental insecurity and its impacts via the lens of a human rights-based analysis'

Overview

UNCRC Human Rights Analysis – The Psychological Society of Ireland’s (PSI) response to the call from the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child: Draft General Comment No. 26

- Environmental degradation: children’s differing experiences
- Climate Anxiety – A psychological perspective on UNCRC Article 24
- Human security and the UNDP – A role for health
- Select Recommendations:
 - Mental health and physical health parity
 - Education and awareness raising
- Concluding remarks - Climate Anxiety or Climate Trauma?

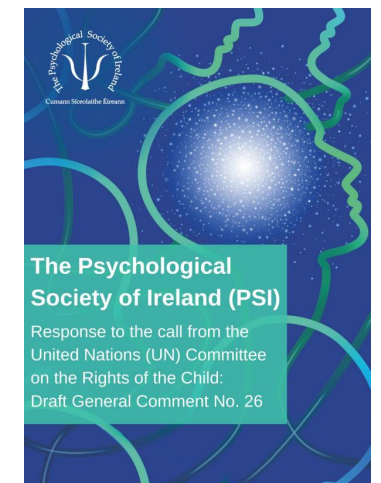


The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)

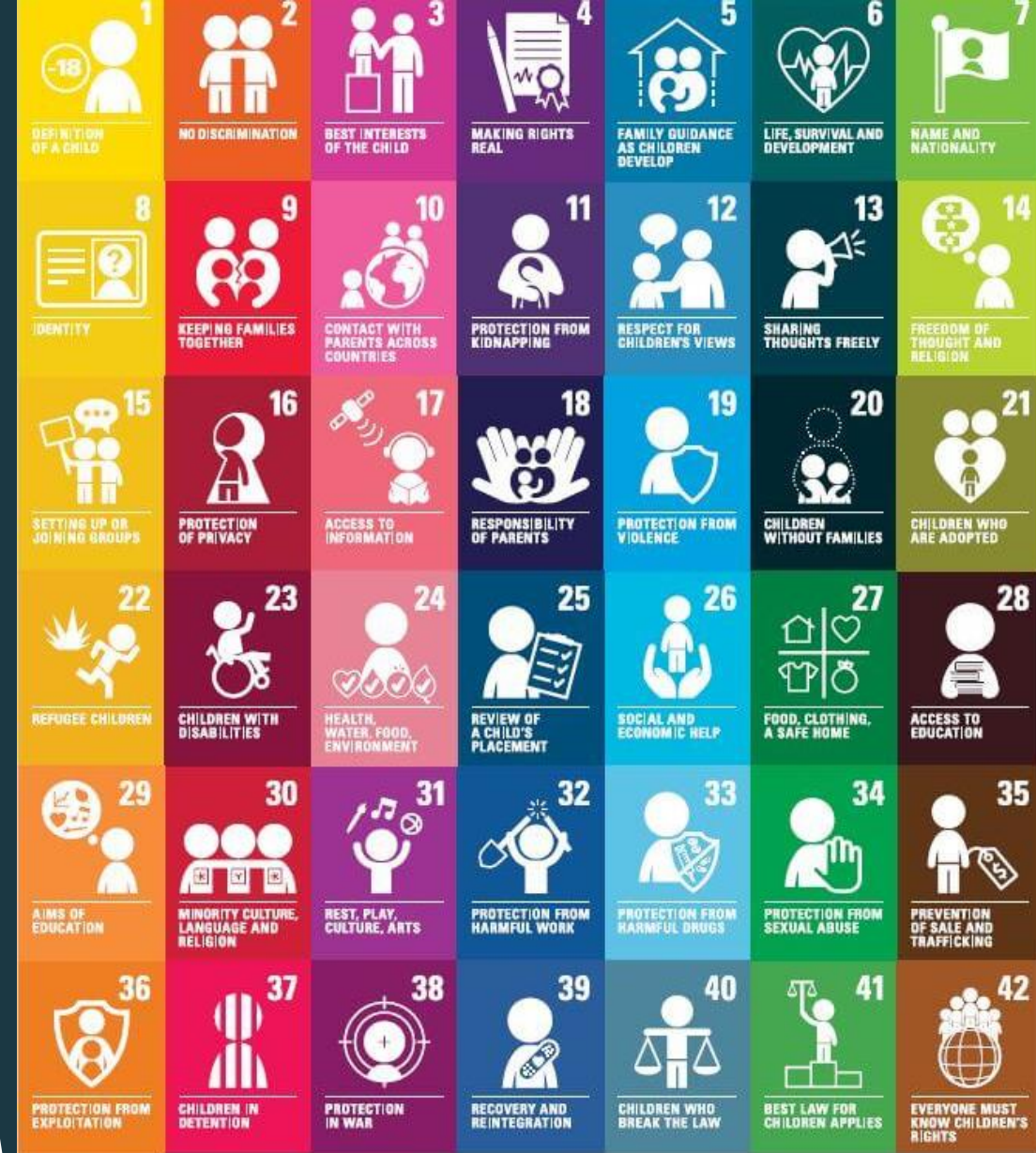
Response to the call from the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child: Draft General Comment No. 26

The Psychological Society of Ireland's (PSI) response to the call from the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child: Draft General Comment No. 26

- The **PSI's first ever submission to the UN.**
- Cover Story, April 2023, **The Irish Psychologist** 49 (2), 28-31.
- Special Interest Group in Human Rights and Psychology (SIGHRP) made a stakeholder response.
- Opportunity to comment on the connection between child and adolescent mental health and human rights obligations.
- Advocated for policies and initiatives to address this issue in the context of climate change as the call required.



The UNCRC and Draft General Comment No.26



CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

UNCRC and Draft General Comment No. 26

- The United Nations oversees human rights treaty bodies consisting of committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of all core international human rights treaties.
- There are ten human rights treaty bodies, and the CRC is the body of independent experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by its States Parties.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a treaty consisting of three parts, and fifty-four articles, including Article 24 "[recognising the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health...](#)".
- The Committee also has other duties including the adoption of general comments, whose calls to stakeholders can assist discussions to interpret the provisions of the UNCRC.

UNCRC and Draft General Comment No. 26

The recent Draft General Comment No. 26 call for discussion relates to children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change and including child and adolescent health. On examining the remit and parameters we decided to weigh in on:

III. "Specific rights of the Convention as they relate to the environment",

B. The right to the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24),

Point 27. "... children's current and anticipated psychosocial, emotional and mental health problems and suffering caused by environmental harm".

Draft General Comment No. 26 and the psychologies...

- Rather than present an exhaustive set of recommendations, we emphasised how we were highlighting concerns in line with [UNCRC Article 24](#) and how the issue of environmental degradation and children's awareness of climate change present an important linkage to children's mental health and well-being.
- 'Child' as defined in the UN Convention as a person under the age of 18 years
- Our comment outlines potential elements of priority for consideration and advocacy from this perspective.



Environmental degradation and children's differing experiences



Children's *differing experiences* of environmental degradation

- Environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and climate change impact children's human rights and present a serious threat to future generations' enjoyment of health, security and well-being connected human rights.
- Distressingly, **1.7 million children lose their lives annually** as a result of avoidable environmental impacts, while millions more are impacted by disease, displaced from their homes and miss out on receiving education.



Environmental degradation
is detrimental to children's
health in **developed**
countries



Air pollution causes over **1,200 premature deaths** per year in people under the age of 18 in Europe and significantly increases the risk of disease later in life (EU Environmental Agency).



Environmental
degradation
compounds other
negative influences

- Although mental health can be shaped by social determinants of health including poverty, food security/nutrition, neighbourhood/community, and trauma, environmental changes are compounding these influences in the lives of children.
- Cascading factors.... Psychological impact...



The Climate Crisis is a **Children's Rights Crisis** - Unicef

Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) uses data to generate new global evidence on how many children are currently exposed to climate and environmental hazards, shocks and stresses.

Analyses exposure to climate and environmental hazards, shocks and stresses; and child vulnerability. The CCRI helps to understand and measure the likelihood of climate and environmental shocks or stresses leading to the erosion of development progress, the deepening of deprivation and/or humanitarian situations affecting children or vulnerable households and groups.



Environmental degradation and involuntary displacement

*In 2019 alone, some **23.9 million** people were involuntarily displaced by weather-related disasters, many of which were children.*

- Sadly, children are disproportionately affected by climate change and man-made disasters, with around 500 million children living in areas with very high risk of flooding and nearly 160 million living in areas of extreme or high risk of drought.

Climate Anxiety -
A psychological
perspective on
UNCRC Article 24



Climate Anxiety - A psychology perspective



Since the previous Draft General Comment No. 26, innovative medical and mental health research has discovered a potential relationship between Climate Anxiety and anxiety disorders.

Climate Anxiety relates to how humans may perceive, fear, or dread the impacts of climate change via anxiety and apprehension over both immediate and future threats.

Climate Anxiety may be for oneself and one's own family (egoistic), for future generations (social-altruistic), or for the environment and animals (biospheric).

The **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders** (DSM-5, 5th Edition), categorises anxiety disorders as groups of symptoms that are chronic, severe, manifesting as clinically maladaptive behaviours including restlessness, irritability, panic, sleep and digestive disturbance.

Climate Anxiety, children and youth

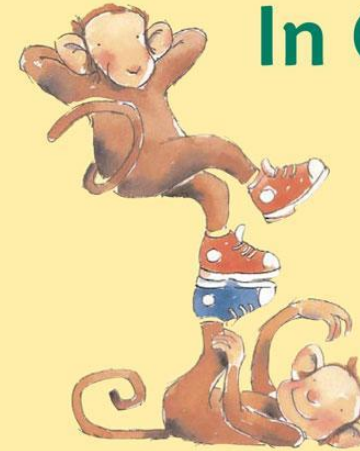
- Symptoms diverge between individuals and across ages; however, they may include negative thoughts and chronic rumination, restlessness, panic attacks, sleep, and digestive disturbance.
- Climate Anxiety has been **associated with clinical behavioural clusters** including excessive worrying, difficulty sleeping, and negative impacts on work, study, and family relationships.
- Globally, children experience increasing mental health distress as a result of climate change and its bleak narrative.
- Climate Anxiety diverges from anxiety disorders because it presents a rational response to a real, major, and global threat. Increasingly, we see children across a range of ages and maturity readily demonstrate their understanding of the threat climate change poses.



Climate Anxiety, children and youth

- In accordance with the **UNCRC Article 12**, children who are capable of forming their own opinions have a right to freely express their views in all matters affecting them.
- Given an opportunity, many children and adolescents readily express their climate empathy and climate distress, and may even be uniquely predisposed to Climate Anxiety.
- As psychologists, we understand that children and adolescents are cognisant of the peril climate change presents to their life and future.
- Similar to adults, they have the capacity to recognise the real psychological, physiological, and social threat to their environment and future it presents.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child In Child Friendly Language



"Rights" are things every child should have or be able to do. All children have the same rights. These rights are listed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Almost every country has agreed to these rights. All the rights are connected to each other, and all are equally important. Sometimes, we have to think about rights in terms of what is the best for children in a situation, and what is critical to life and protection from harm. As you grow, you have more responsibility to make choices and exercise your rights.

Article 1
Everyone under 18 has these rights.

Article 2
All children have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Article 3
All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

Article 4
The government has a responsibility to make sure your rights are protected. They must help your family to protect your rights and create an environment where you can grow and reach your potential.

Article 5
Your family has the responsibility to help you learn to exercise your rights, and to ensure that your rights are protected.

Article 6
You have the right to be alive.

Article 7
You have the right to a name, and this should be officially recognized by the government. You have the right to a nationality (to belong to a country).

Article 8
You have the right to an identity – an official record of who you are. No one should take this away from you.

Article 9
You have the right to live with your parents, unless it is bad for you. You have the right to live with a family who cares for you.

Article 10
If you live in a different country than your parents do, you have the right to be together in the same place.

Article 11
You have the right to be protected from kidnapping.

Article 12
You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.

Article 13
You have the right to find out things and share

Article 15
You have the right to choose your own friends and join or set up groups, as long as it isn't harmful to others.

Article 16
You have the right to privacy.

Article 17
You have the right to get information that is important to your well-being, from radio, newspaper, books, computers and other sources. Adults should make sure that the information you are getting is not harmful, and help you find and understand the information you need.

Article 18
You have the right to be raised by your parent(s) if possible.

Article 19
You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.

Article 20
You have the right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents.

Article 21
You have the right to care and protection if you are adopted or in foster care.

Article 22
You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee (if you have been forced to leave your home and live in another country), as well as all the rights in this Convention.

Article 23
You have the right to special education and care if you have a disability, as well as all the rights in this Convention, so that you can live a full life.

Article 24
You have the right to the best health care possible, safe water to drink, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help you stay well.

Article 25
If you live in care or in other situations away from home, you have the right to have these living arrangements looked at regularly to see if they are the most appropriate.

Article 26
You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need.

Article 27

Article 28
You have the right to a good quality education. You should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level you can.

Article 29
Your education should help you use and develop your talents and abilities. It should also help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

Article 30
You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion - or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.

Article 31
You have the right to play and rest.

Article 32
You have the right to protection from work that harms you, and is bad for your health and education. If you work, you have the right to be safe and paid fairly.

Article 33
You have the right to protection from harmful drugs and from the drug trade.

Article 34
You have the right to be free from sexual abuse. Article 35 No one is allowed to kidnap or sell you.

Article 36
You have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation (being taken advantage of).

Article 37
No one is allowed to punish you in a cruel or harmful way.

Article 38
You have the right to protection and freedom from war. Children under 15 cannot be forced to go into the army or take part in war.

Article 39
You have the right to help if you've been hurt, neglected or badly treated.

Article 40
You have the right to legal help and fair treatment in the justice system that respects your rights.

Article 41
If the laws of your country provide better protection of your rights than the articles in this Convention, those laws should apply.

Article 42
You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them, too.

Articles 43 to 54
These articles explain how governments and international organizations like UNICEF will work to ensure children are protected with their rights.



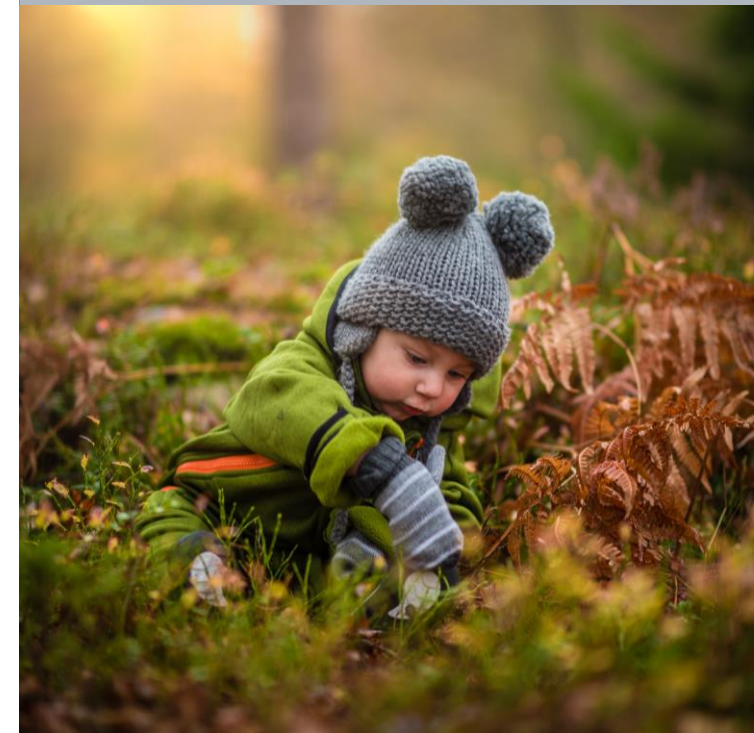
unicef



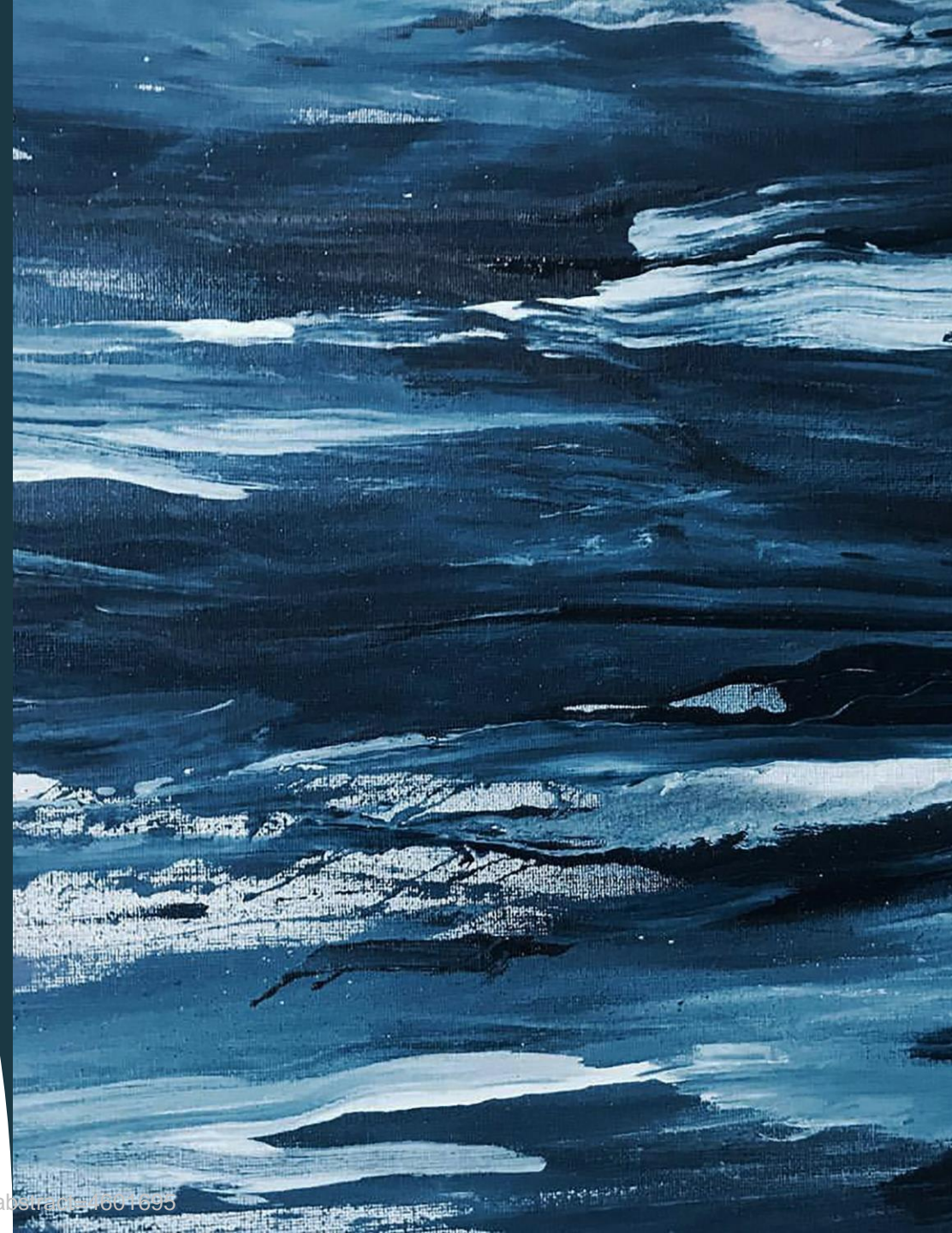
Canadian Heritage

Climate Anxiety is **not a pathology**

- Paradoxically, from a psychological perspective, climate anxious behaviour is on the one hand healthy because it presents the impetus for an adaptive psychological, physiological, or behavioural response to threats in the environment.
- On the other hand recent research suggests experience of worry and distress in response to climate change may range from mild to clinical anxiety (e.g., functional impairment).
- We do not advocate for pathologising Climate Anxiety.
- Rather support foregrounding climate justice, by centring power operations in the child's personal sensemaking whilst recognising the need for change is at political, structural, systemic, and cultural levels.

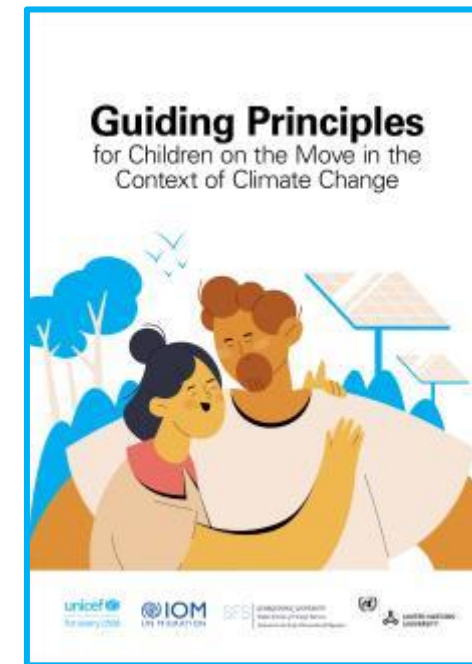


Human security and the UNDP - A role for health



Human Security and the Climate Crisis – Children on the move

- [Unicef's Guiding Principles Reports 2020](#) for assuring rights for refugee and migrant children
- [PSI & SIGHRP Submission to the International Union of Psychological Sciences \(IUPsyS\) 2022](#) on dealing with international crisis and emergencies including climate migrant influx, e.g., refugees, via lens of human rights for psychologies
- Assuring health services and participation in decision making...



Human Security and the United Nations Development Programme

UNDP

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are two separate initiatives within the United Nations system, but they share a common goal of promoting the well-being and rights of children around the world.
- The UNDP supports the UNCRC by providing technical assistance and capacity building to governments and civil society organisations working to promote children's rights.
- For example, working with governments to develop policies and laws that are aligned with the principles of the UNCRC.



Human Security and its components

- While there is no universal definition of human security, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has identified seven components of human security.

Health and community:

- **Health security:** This refers to the ability of individuals and communities to access healthcare services and information, and to maintain good physical and mental health (parity of services)
- **Community security:** This refers to the ability of individuals and communities to live in peaceful and cohesive societies, where people have a sense of belonging and are able to participate in decision-making processes.



Recommendations

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)

Response to the call from the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child: Draft General Comment No. 26

Parity of mental and physical health

- **Article 24** of the UNCRC recognises the right of the child to the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health.
- While it is vital for States Parties to combat disease, provide adequate nutrition, clean drinking water, and intervene when the risk of environmental pollution presents, it is recommended States Parties should also endeavour to recognise mental health's parity, with physical health.
- Allocate resources appropriately, so as to prevent illness and loss of well-being (e.g., whether it be tackling air pollution risks posing neurodevelopmental skills, or enacting solutions to aid children and adolescents adapt to their Climate Anxiety concerns).

See also [Report of the First Children and Young People's Consultation on the General Comment No. 26 documents](#), 2022.



Allocate the resources of States Parties to climate change **education** and awareness raising

- Introduce climate change education and resources at primary and secondary school age.
- States Parties should enable children and adolescents to contribute their views and experiences on the development, implementation, and monitoring of these education programme plans.
- Research shows that children who are knowledgeable about the UNCRRC, and have their views taken into account when decisions affecting them are made, rate measurably higher on subjective well-being indicators than those who do not.



Allocate the resources of States Parties to climate change education and awareness raising

- The UNCRC's Article 17 details children's right to appropriate information and encourages States Parties to develop and adopt appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to their well-being.
- Enabling participatory and well-informed consumer decisions are likely to support children as noncomplicit actors in the climate crisis, thereby countering Climate Anxiety and promoting climate-informed well-being.

Climate Justice Safe Space Forum - International and Inclusive



Concluding remarks



Children's differing experiences and UNCRC Article 24: Anxiety or **trauma**?

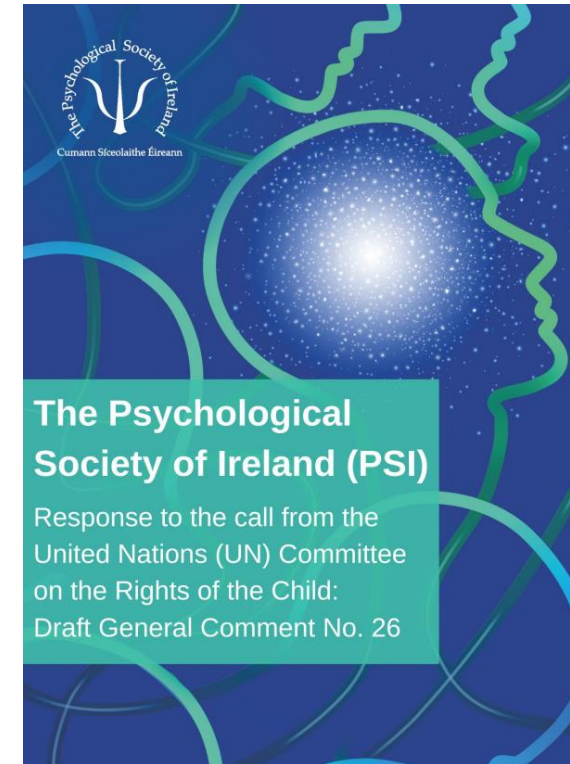
- Much of the evidence comes from the Western countries. Indigenous peoples and children connected to the natural world are most impacted by Climate Anxiety - indeed **climate trauma**, and are, therefore, identified as vulnerable.
- The unjust paradox of climate justice is that those who contribute least to climate change suffer most insecurity and understand more about the **impetus to migrate**.
- This potentially holds true for health and mental health whether people decide to stay where they are or seek out a better future.
- In line with other researchers, we believe a research agenda reflecting a global perspective is required, to increase share of voice by non-Western countries -
- **Trauma-informed border policies via human rights lens?**



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For full discussion please download at:

[PSI response to UN Committee on Rights of the Child - Draft
General comment No-26 \(SIGHRP\).pdf \(psychologicalsociety.ie\)](https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/SIGHRP/PSI%20response%20to%20UN%20Committee%20on%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child%20-%20Draft%20General%20comment%20No-26%20(SIGHRP).pdf)



Thank you!

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