



Summary of key issues from previous UPR cycles

During the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, Belgium received several recommendations related to environmental protection and the fight against climate change (recommendations 36.29 to 36.32). However, **no recommendation specifically addressed children's rights to a healthy environment**, despite the particularly serious effects of the environmental and climate crisis on children.

Since then, **the international normative framework has evolved significantly**. In 2023, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted **General Comment No. 26**, specifying for the first time in detail the obligations of States to protect children's rights in the face of the environmental and climate crisis. This Observation explicitly recognises that environmental degradation constitutes a direct threat to the effective enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

In this context, the absence of targeted recommendations in previous UPR cycles appears to be a blind spot that needs to be corrected in the current review.

National framework

Children are particularly vulnerable to environmental damage due to their physiological characteristics, stage of development and lifestyles. In Belgium, this vulnerability is exacerbated by a worrying level of environmental exposure. According to international data, **Belgium is among the OECD countries below the European average in terms of air quality**. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has already highlighted, in its 2019 concluding observations, the negative impact of air pollution on children's health, particularly in terms of asthma and respiratory diseases.

The climate crisis is increasing these risks: heat waves, ozone peaks, floods and air pollution disproportionately affect infants, children under five and pregnant women, with potentially serious, lasting and even irreversible effects on children's rights, particularly their right to health. Although **Belgium signed the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action in 2022**, the concrete translation of these commitments into coherent, ambitious and child rights-centred policies remains insufficient.

Challenges and impact

The main challenges identified have direct and structural consequences on children's rights:

- **High exposure of children to air pollution**, contributing to an increase in respiratory diseases, including asthma, and having a lasting impact on their health ;
- **Increased vulnerability to heat waves and ozone peaks**, particularly in schools, childcare facilities and disadvantaged neighbourhoods ;
- Lack of systematic consideration of children's specific needs in environmental and climate policies ;
- Lack of explicit recognition of children's right to a healthy environment in public policies and monitoring mechanisms.



RIGHT TO A HEALTHY, CLEAN AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

13 CLIMATE
ACTION



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement ambitious, coordinated and legally binding measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 (compared to 1990), in line with its international commitments and the 2023 ruling of the Brussels Court of Appeal.
- Strengthen policies to combat air pollution, taking into account the recommendations of United Nations bodies and ensuring greater protection for children in their everyday environment (housing, nurseries, schools, transport, etc.).
- Adapt regional plans for heat waves and ozone peaks to systematically incorporate the specific needs of children, particularly in schools, childcare facilities and disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- Explicitly integrate children's rights into environmental and climate policies, in accordance with General Comment No. 26 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Online file :

<https://lacode.be/projet/upr-2026-factsheets/>



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This fact sheet is part of a series of fact sheets written on the situation of children's rights in Belgium for information purposes in the context of Belgium's Periodic Review. Their drafting was coordinated by CSOs and NHRIs that are members of a working group on the UPR, led by the National Commission for Children's Rights.