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Authors	Daly, Aoife;Purcell, Niamh;Montesinos Calvo-Fernández, Esther;Murray, Emily Margaret
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Participation and Postpaternalism

Child/youth Climate Action and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

*Aoife Daly^a; Niamh Purcell^b; Esther Montesinos Calvo-Fernández^c and
Emily Margaret Murray^d*

a)Professor of Law, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

Corresponding author

aoife.daly@ucc.ie

b)Climate Advocate, Ireland

youthclimatejustice@ucc.ie

c)Researcher, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

youthclimatejustice@ucc.ie

d)PhD Researcher, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

emily.murray@ucc.ie

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Abstract

Children and youth have been engaging in climate action in significant numbers in recent years. They have engaged in protests in the streets, as well as dialogue with governments and intergovernmental organisations. In recent years they have been taking climate cases against governments with the aim of decreasing emissions in an effort to mitigate the climate crisis. In this article, we examine this action through the lens of child/youth participation. We begin by examining how the right to a healthy environment has developed. We then consider how participation rights for children have developed since the advent of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and, in particular, how the Lundy model frames children's participation. Drawing on various examples of child/youth climate action, we apply the concepts of space, voice, audience and influence. We also consider the “postpaternalism” in different types of participation in environmental initiatives.

Keywords

climate action – climate litigation – participation – Lundy model – postpaternalism – COP

1 Introduction

Children and youth have been engaging in climate action in significant numbers in recent years. They have engaged in protests in the streets. They have been in dialogue with governments and intergovernmental organisations, such as the UN (e.g. with the Committee on the Rights of the Child (“the Committee”). They have been taking part in COP and working with non-governmental organisations working on the environment and human rights. In recent years they have been taking climate cases against governments with the aim of decreasing emissions in an effort to mitigate the climate crisis. In this article, we examine child/youth efforts to mitigate climate change through the lens of child/youth participation.

Written by academics and a young person with extensive experience of youth climate action, in this article, we aim to consider the gains made in the environmental arena by children for both the environment and for themselves as active agents. We begin by examining how the right to a healthy environment has developed and the ways in which that right encompasses procedural aspects. We then consider how participation rights for children have developed since the advent of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (“CRC”) and, in particular, how the Lundy model frames children’s participation with the concepts of space, voice, audience and influence. We then turn to consider how some of the different types of child/youth climate action can be situated within the Lundy model. In particular (although not exclusively) we examine COP, youth climate litigation and Ireland’s children and youth biodiversity assembly. Drawing on different examples of child/youth climate action, we consider how voice, space, audience and influence are being applied (or not). We conclude by asking to what extent child/youth climate action represents a “postpaternal” time for children’s rights (Daly *et al.*, 2024), in that it represents children taking action (for the first time, on a global scale), rather than well-meaning adults “giving” children their rights.

We do not aim to give a comprehensive overview of all youth climate action and the extent to which it constitutes child participation, but rather to provide some initial thoughts about how some specific examples fit within

the CRC and other important standards. We position children/youth¹ as important environmental advocates, and outline that participation is a crucial principle when it comes to child/youth climate action. We argue that child/youth climate action is a phenomenon which has distinct elements to it. Some distinct features are that children and youth have accessed spaces in a way they have not before (e.g. COP); they have spontaneously created their *own* spaces (protesting in the streets in large numbers for example); and they sometimes receive a high level of bullying (e.g. online) for engaging in climate action. There are therefore particular elements of participation which must be considered when it comes to child/youth climate action in this postpaternalist era. We are a multidisciplinary writing team consisting of Aoife Daly, Esther Montesinos Calvo-Fernández and Emily Murray, who work on international children's rights standards, and Niamh Purcell, a young climate advocate who has taken part in many environmental initiatives, including Ireland's child and youth assembly on biodiversity 2022–2023 (Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, 2023).

2 Children and the Right to a Healthy Environment

The interrelated relationship between human rights and the environment has become a central concern of international law in recent decades (Limon, 2009). As the climate crisis intensifies and States fail adequately to address harmful environmental practices, communities around the world are calling for more effective and transformative climate action. Among these voices, children and young people are at the forefront, actively drawing attention to the impacts that the climate crisis has on the realisation of their rights and the irreversible harm being inflicted on the planet and its ecosystems. At the national, regional and international levels, younger generations are asserting their environmental rights through various forms of advocacy such as solidarity marches, protests and strategic litigation. Through this action, children and young people are being recognised as important stakeholders and agents of change in environmental matters, while demonstrating that participation is a key element for upholding the right to a healthy environment (Daly *et al.*, 2024).

¹ References to children/youth will be taken to refer in this article to under-18s unless otherwise specified, although there is much overlap between the experiences, rights and needs of children, and those of young adults, engaging in climate action.

The right to a healthy environment evolved significantly over the past half-century. In 2022 it was recognised by both the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations via resolutions of those UN bodies (UN General Assembly, 2022). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that children's rights are inextricably linked to the natural world. The right to health (Article 24) obliges States to consider 'the dangers and risks of environmental pollution'. In 2023, the Committee released General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, which highlights the impact of the environmental crisis on children's rights and the actions that governments, businesses and others should take to uphold these rights. It was the first time the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was recognised as a stand-alone right within the CRC.

"Participation" in environmental issues is considered a crucial pre-condition of democratic environmental governance. The Aarhus Convention, and the Escazú Agreement in Latin America/Caribbean (Amaya, 2025), both establish the grounds for procedural requirements relating to access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice around the environment. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) has also strongly emphasised that children have the right to access environmental information, the right to participate in environmental decision-making, and the right to access justice. Despite these frameworks, significant challenges remain in ensuring children's procedural rights. Barriers to public participation, limited access to information and financial obstacles frequently hinder young climate activists from fully exercising their rights. Many States continue to fall short in fulfilling their obligation to guarantee the participation of children/youth in environmental decision-making, and the costs of litigation further restrict their ability to seek justice (Martins *et al.*, 2023; Daly and Lundy, 2022). Addressing these shortcomings is essential to ensuring meaningful youth engagement in environmental governance.

In recent years, children and youth have seized the opportunity to voice their concerns through their own spheres of competence and demand more urgent and ambitious climate policies from governments. Children and young people have come together globally to prove themselves as changemakers, embodying a spirit of what Pickard (2019) called "doing-it-ourselves", and taking action for their own future rather than waiting for adults to act on their behalf (Daly *et al.*, 2024). Given that children and young people will bear the long-term consequences of the climate crisis far more than older generations (Daly, 2022), ensuring their participation in environmental issues remains essential.

Children and youth have been visible and active in their climate advocacy (Todres, 2023; Dozsa, 2023; Daly, 2022). Perhaps it makes sense, considering the fact that children struggle to access environmental justice (Daly and Lundy, 2022; Daly 2024), that children and youth have organically engaged in their own advocacy for environmental rights. Historically, young people have been central to various social movements, for example in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, to the Arab Spring. Their involvement in climate activism follows this historical trend, demonstrating their ability to mobilise and influence public discourse. Children and young people, particularly from Indigenous communities, have long played a key role in climate activism. However, their action surged in 2018 when Greta Thunberg began her school strikes outside the Swedish parliament. Her lone protests soon evolved into a global youth movement, #FridaysForFuture, engaging millions worldwide. More recently, young activists have expanded their impact beyond protests, making their voices heard in courtrooms through climate-related legal actions both at national and international levels (Donger, 2023).

A key factor in the success of the youth climate movement may be that it has revealed to many adults, perhaps for the first time, just how politically competent young people can be on a global scale. Daly (2022) identifies several factors that contribute to the “climate competence” of many children/youth – digital literacy, scientific knowledge and a perceived moral authority in comparison to the adults who have created the climate crisis. Growing up with awareness of climate change, learning about it in school, and witnessing its effects firsthand, have given young people a unique perspective and a strong sense of urgency. Many have directly experienced climate-related harms, such as extreme weather events, which fuel their determination to act. Additionally, young activists benefit from unprecedented access to scientific information, allowing them to become experts in climate science and use their knowledge to educate others and advocate for change. For example, Arjun Marwaha, a high school student from California, has leveraged his understanding of climate science to enhance his credibility and effectiveness as an activist and inform other young people about available research (Marwaha, 2019). Online activism has also played a crucial role, as young people use digital platforms to spread awareness and organise global movements without relying on traditional media or political institutions. Campaigns such as #ClimateStrikeOnline and #FridaysForFuture gained traction largely through social media, demonstrating how digital tools empower youth to create impactful campaigns (Finnegan, 2020). Online activism has also extended into legal advocacy, as seen in the *Juliana v. United States* case, where youth-led initiatives mobilised thousands to support the lawsuit through online petitions (Our Children's Trust, 2019).

The climate crisis has brought to the fore some new and innovative fora through which children have been able to participate. Children and youth have been involved in numerous climate cases/application since 2020 (although there had been a small number of these before this point²). In climate litigation, child/youth litigants are usually experienced climate activists, such as Greta Thunberg in *Sacchi*, and Xiuhtezcatl Martinez in *Juliana* (Daly, 2024). They are frequently members of active climate groups such as Fridays for Future. In the Australian *Sharma* case, for example, legal representative Jack McLean described the young litigants in that case as ‘amazing, seasoned campaigners’ for the Australian group School Strike for Climate who had already had a lot of media experience (Daly, 2024).

Another forum which is becoming increasingly important for involving children in democratic deliberations about the climate crisis is the citizens assembly. This is a type of deliberative forum in which a representative group of participants (who have been randomly selected) congregate to deliberate on a topic after being informed on it in various ways. They then go on to create an output together on the topic. These outputs may include recommendations and Calls to Actions. As Deane *et al.* (this issue) outline, Ireland is somewhat of a pioneer in relation to citizens’ assemblies; and of involving children in them. In 2019, Ireland’s Youth Assembly on Climate was held and they presented their views in a high-profile, policy-influencing forum (Deane *et al.*, this issue). In 2022, Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly on biodiversity loss was established. In parallel, a separate independent process for children and young people was initiated (Children and Young People’s Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, 2023). The participation of children and youth in such initiatives is considered further below.

While the ultimate success of the youth climate movement remains to be seen, its visibility is undeniable. Young people have mobilised millions, altered public discourse, and even impacted government policies. Their creativity, digital fluency and ability to command media attention make them uniquely positioned to continue leading the climate justice movement. In the next section, we turn to consider how young climate action relates to child participation.

2 *Minors Oposa v. Secretary of the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources*, Philippines, 1993; *Juliana v. US* 947 F 3d 1159 (9th Cir, 2020), first filed in 2015; and Corte Suprema de Justicia [C.S.J.] [Supreme Court], Sala de Casación Civil, abril 5, 2018, M.P.: L.A. Tolosa Villabona, Expediente 11001-22-03-000-2018-00319-01 (Colom.).

3 Participation Rights under the CRC

Defined as one of the general principles of the CRC, Article 12 provides that every child capable of forming their own views must be assured the right to express those views in all matters affecting them and have them given due weight in accordance with age and maturity, including in judicial and administrative proceedings (CRC, 1989). The Committee has interpreted this article as a substantive and procedural right. Accordingly, Article 12 provides a means to ensure the effective realisation of all children's rights and empowers children to take political and civil actions to advocate for their rights and hold States accountable (Molloy, 2024; Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

These provisions have been generally conceptualised as “participation” (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, para. 3), and the Committee outlines that participation involves processes in which children and youth have engaged in dialogues and information-sharing activities with adults based on mutual respect, and in which their views have served to shape the outcome of such processes. Children's participation can take form in many different ways and levels – ranging from simple consultation on their needs and problems, to shaping designs and plans, collaborating with adults in governance structures, or even leading their own initiatives.

Article 12 has reflected and contributed to a more progressive understanding of childhood. Prior to the adoption of the CRC, children were widely considered as “adults in waiting” (Molloy, 2024) rather than human beings. This school of thought, influenced in part by insights from developmental psychology, described children as ‘natural rather than social phenomena and this naturalness includes an inevitable process of maturation towards an idealised, fixed end’ (Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2014, 120). This lens portrays children as lacking many of the attributes associated with adulthood, such as independence, competence and agency (Molloy, 2024). Only when they reach the stage of adulthood is their political status fully recognised (such as the right to vote). Article 12 of the CRC, however, transforms the status of the child from one of passive recipient of adult care and protection to one of active participation and agency. As observed by Freeman (1996), Article 12 is significant, because it recognises that children are full human beings with integrity and personality, and with the ability to participate in society.

Since the adoption of the CRC in 1989, significant advancements have been achieved at various levels – local, national, regional and global – regarding the development of legislation, policies and methodologies to facilitate the

implementation of Article 12 (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Children's engagement in political and democratic life is supported by several structures and stakeholders. At the national level, youth councils, children's parliaments and the offices of Ombudspersons for Children are among the most established mechanisms enabling children's direct participation in political and democratic life (European Commission, 2020).

It is against the backdrop of these developments in legal standards and in understandings of children's capabilities that child/youth climate action has developed. It is not possible directly to identify links between the changes across societies in recent decades on the one hand, and the influence of Article 12 (which insists on children as active agents in their own lives) on the other. However, it appears quite likely that the global mobilisation of children and youth around the world in relation to climate action was supported by the change brought about by CRC Article 12.

It is striking that in 2023 in its General Comment of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, the Committee strongly emphasises children as climate advocates. They state that children's climate action has created the impetus for drafting this important instrument (para. 2). The Committee also emphasises the work of human rights defenders who are children: pointing to the fact that they are agents of change who 'have made historic contributions to human rights and environmental protection' (para. 4). The Committee also states that, 'children's voices are a powerful global force for environmental protection, and their views add relevant perspectives and experience with respect to decision-making on environmental matters at all levels' (para. 4). It is clear that children are now recognised on the international stage as crucial actors in relation to environmental matters, and the CRC is part of that picture of recognition.

This has led Daly *et al.* (2024) to propose that child participation has evolved due to young climate action, leading to a postpaternalist era whereby children and youth are shaping the meaning of their own human rights. Features of postpaternalism include some of the following elements: global environmental movements; children taking their own action, unprompted by adults; children working with adult allies as equals; children using legal and human rights frameworks to progress environmental rights; children taking a relational approach which includes respect for the environment *per se* (see further Mortensen, this issue); children taking postcolonial approaches in their action; and a disruption of traditional boundaries such as over- and under-18s working together.

The principle of participation has been globally endorsed, as evidenced by the near universal ratification of the CRC. However, children's meaningful participation has been difficult to implement (Kennan *et al.*, 2018; Tyler, 2006; Seim and Slettebø, 2017). Research has shown that one obstacle is the conceptual ambiguity surrounding participation and the limited understanding of its practical application (Kennan *et al.*, 2018, van Bijleveld, 2014, McCafferty, 2017). The realisation of children's rights under Article 12 largely relies on facilitation by adults, yet they may either lack commitment to it or have vested interests in resisting its implementation. As emphasised by Lundy (2007), adult concerns typically involve: scepticism about children's capacity to contribute meaningfully to decision-making; a worry that granting children greater agency could disrupt authority structures; and concern that compliance may divert resources from other core priorities.

In the last decade, there has been much valuable work that has sought to address these concerns by demonstrating the benefits of engaging children in decision-making and identifying best practices for fostering meaningful participation (Lloyd and Emerson, 2017, Lundy, 2007). One such work is the "Lundy Model" which clarified the scope of a practitioner's obligations when implementing Article 12. This model identifies four interrelated components essential for realising children's right to be heard: first, "space" (children must be provided with the opportunity to express a view in a space that is safe and inclusive), second, "voice" (children must be facilitated to express their view), third, "audience" (the view must be listened to), fourth, "influence" (the view must be acted upon, as appropriate). These components are relevant to both personal and public decision-making, with the former encompassing individual children's right to express views on issues affecting their lives and the latter encompassing the collective right of children to influence public decision-making (Kennan *et al.*, 2021).

This framework has gained widespread recognition as a practical tool for realising the participatory rights set out in Article 12 of the CRC. The Lundy Model provides a structured means of operationalising participation in ways that are contextually responsive, accountable and meaningful. Each element – space, voice, audience, and influence – functions as a necessary condition for ensuring that children are not only able to express their views but also that those views are listened to and acted upon in a manner that respects children's competence and prioritises their best interests. Considering the importance of the Lundy model, and its influence in the arena of children's rights to date, it is a particularly useful model through which to examine child and youth climate action as a feature of CRC participation rights.

4 Considering Child/Youth Climate Action through the Lens of the Lundy Model

4.1 *Space*

The first component, *Space*, emphasises the creation of safe, inclusive and enabling environments in which children are actively invited to express their views (Lundy, 2007; Lansdown, 2009). Article 12 requires States to ‘assure’ children’s rights to be heard, which shows a stronger obligation than more tentative language found elsewhere in the CRC. This requires that children are not only provided with opportunities to express their views but are also asked what issues matter to them and how they wish to participate (Lundy, 2007). Lundy states that a ‘prerequisite for the meaningful engagement of children and young people in decision making is creating an opportunity for involvement – a space in which children are encouraged to express their views’ (2007: 933).

In comparison to other issues, it is particularly important that adults create spaces for children and youth when it comes to climate initiatives. There are a number of reasons for this, for example children will have to live longer with the crisis. Spaces must be safe and inclusive however – children should not fear reprisal or ridicule for expressing their views, and every child, irrespective of their social background or other status, must have the right to participate. Thus, creating space includes safeguarding mechanisms such as anonymous platforms for expression and efforts to counteract other barriers that may limit genuine participation (Lundy, 2007).

There are a number of environmental initiatives which exemplify the “space” dimension of the Lundy Model by intentionally creating inclusive, safe and structured opportunities for young people to engage meaningfully with global climate governance. One is the Academy for Global Youth Leadership Empowerment (AGYLE) Latin America. Launched in June 2022, AGYLE Latin America provides a platform for Latin American youth to come together for knowledge sharing, and partnership around climate action. Through structured modules – delivered both online and in-person – participants learn about standards such as the Paris Agreement. It equips young people with skills to participate in global climate negotiations and policymaking, ensuring that they are prepared and supported to contribute to climate decision-making processes (UN Climate Change, 2022). In South Africa, the “Black Girls Rising” project supports girls to become climate advocates in their communities. As part of this, the “intergenerational space programme” aims to create an

intergenerational, empowered black community through workshops with girls and parents/carers.³

In Scotland, children were meaningfully supported to express their views on climate action in the lead-up to COP26. In 2021, the Scottish Children's Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament hosted *The Moment*, a nationwide initiative to enable children to engage in dialogue on a pressing global issue (Scotland's Climate Assembly, 2021). Hundreds of children were provided with age-appropriate information, and met with elected representatives to present their climate-related calls to action. In parallel, over 100 children took part in a Children's Citizens' Assembly from 2020–2021. After examining expert evidence and engaging in peer discussion, a core group of 12 “investigators” led the development of 42 Calls to Action on tackling the climate crisis. These initiatives illustrate how structured, supported spaces can enable children to explore complex topics and express their perspectives in ways that are both informed and impactful (Daly and Lundy, 2022).

Kennan *et al.* (2018) emphasise that ways of creating a safe and inclusive space for children include art, play therapy and drama. In Ireland's biodiversity assembly, a Child and Youth Participation practitioner was engaged to ensure that children's work in the assembly was done through games, art and other activities to keep proceedings fun and engaging. In order to learn about biodiversity, they went on a nature walk, with one assembly member saying: ‘I really liked the nature walk ... nature [was] all around us. I learned so much about the biodiversity of the area’ (Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, 2023: 20). The children and youth also learned about complex biodiversity problems through art and games:

We got to learn about overexploitation by playing a game of fisherperson. We were given a napkin to represent our boat and different colours of jelly beans to represent different types of fish. The first time we were allowed to fish, we were too greedy and only left one fish. That was not good for nature. So we played again and this time we learned to leave some fish so we could fish again next year.

Assembly member, age 10, Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, 2023: 23

In the Scottish climate assembly, as well as engaging child safeguarding tools for proceedings, the organisers worked with climate anxiety psychologists to ensure the welfare of the children involved (Reid, 2024: 279).

3 See: <https://blackgirlsrising.org.za/parent-and-daughter/>. Last accessed 5 May 2025.

One thing which appears to make child/youth climate action different, however, is the postpaternalist way in which children are taking their own action (and consequently creating their own spaces), rather than taking part in adult-created spaces (Daly *et al.*, 2024). Social movements against climate change often appear to come from grassroots level on a global scale and child/youth climate action appears to have had the same trajectory. In 2016, for example, young people from Standing Rock and nearby Native American communities launched efforts to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAP). They argued that it constituted a significant threat to the region's water and that it would harm their way of life forever. Indigenous adults established a camp as a base for direct action, inspired by the young people, and ultimately there were thousands of people at the camps at Standing Rock. In 2020 a federal court struck down the permit for development of the pipeline and ordered a comprehensive environmental review (Daly, 2022). This is an exciting example of youth themselves creating the space, and adults following.

More broadly, child/youth climate protests in the streets also constitute spaces created by children themselves. In August 2018, then 15-year-old Greta Thunberg began her school climate strikes to protest government inaction. The image of her outside the Swedish parliament sparked the global #fridaysforfuture movement and within a year there were seven million children and youth engaging in school strikes globally (Fridays for Future, 2023). This organic uprising of children and youth was probably a result of a distinct lack of spaces for children and youth in discussions and initiatives in relation to the climate crisis at both domestic and international level. Despite the unequal burden of the climate crisis borne by children and youth, countries frequently do not include them in climate policy-making or environmental decision-making more generally (Parker *et al.*, 2022). In 2020, UNICEF research found that only 34 per cent of 103 countries with new or revised climate plans (Nationally Determined Contributions, required under the Paris Agreement) could be classed as "child sensitive".

One space which has particularly facilitated young climate advocates to take their own action is the Internet. Globally, about one in three users of the internet are children and youth which has facilitated spaces where they can connect with each other in all regions of the world (Hanna and Martinez Sainz, 2023). As with Parkland students campaigning against gun laws linked to school slaughter, these young climate activists have been 'effectively born onto the internet and [are] innately capable of waging an information war' (Warzel, 2018). Not only does the Internet offer access to information and the opportunity to connect with other young climate activists, but it also breaks down hierarchical barriers allowing children and youth to engage with political

leaders and policymakers via sharing content and responding directly to posts on different platforms (Parry, McCarthy, and Clark, 2022). The Internet, as a space being claimed by children and youth as an opportunity to take climate action, stretches from organising local initiatives to connecting to wider global campaigns and conversations.

Examples of the creation of safe spaces for young climate advocates are outlined above. In some ways, however, spaces of climate action can be unsafe for children. Public spaces, particularly social media, may present risks and hostility. The Committee emphasises that children cannot enjoy their Article 12 rights where ‘the environment is intimidating, hostile, insensitive or inappropriate ...’ (2009, para. 34). As Daly *et al.* (2024) point out, children and youth have sometimes felt patronised and disparaged in their climate work. In the *Sharma* case, for example, youth litigants described receiving some hostility online and elsewhere, such as in the media. As one litigant outlines: ‘They were bad mouthing some of us, talking about us in a way that we never thought would come from this. As 16 year olds, we never thought anyone would do that in a public media’. The legal firm of the *Sharma* children and youth worked with them to prepare them for the hostility they might receive and to protect them from it (Daly, 2024: 651).

The *Sharma* case appears, however, to be a good practice example when it comes to child participation. In an effort to ensure that the space was as positive as possible for the young litigants, the law firm engaged media advisors and counsellors experienced in climate anxiety. The firm also thought about ways to communicate well with the young people, for example using WhatsApp chats and live tweeting (Daly, 2024). Thus, as children and youth create their own spaces to take climate action – such as litigating in courtrooms themselves on a scale that has never been seen before – they are challenging dominant narratives around how children and youth have typically been included in spaces to participate and have their voices heard (usually in a tokenistic or adult-led sense). While the Lundy model describes space as being safe and inclusive, the spaces that are being generated for child participation as a result of the youth climate justice movement are not always safe for those involved.

Young climate advocates, including protestors, have often experienced a lack of acceptance that they have civil and political rights. In the UK in 2019, police advised in an official guidance document for authorities aimed at police, government organisations and teachers, that those who ‘participate in school walkouts’ should be reported under an anti-radicalisation programme (Dodd and Grierson, 2020). In the guidance document, authorities were advised to be on the watch for young people who ‘neglect to attend school’ or ‘participate in planned school walkouts’, which was a reference to the school strikes for

the climate global movement inspired by Greta Thuberg. This action by police (although later rescinded) is an example of a lack of understanding that under-18s have a right to protest under Article 15 of the CRC which refers to 'the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly' (Daly, 2016). Political action by under-18s can clearly then be viewed with suspicion rather than being recognised as democratically healthy and a right of the child.

Another obstacle for children's participation rights in relation to climate action is that younger children are frequently neglected in terms of space for participation in climate action. The Committee emphasises that Article 12 imposes no age limit on the right of the child to express her or his views (2009, para. 21). COP is an example of a space where the voices of younger children are distinctly absent (Paz Landeira *et al.*, this issue). Thew (2020) outlines how individuals under 18 were excluded from youth participation at COPs until 2017. After that date, significant limitations continue: for example, those under 18 require the presence of a legal guardian. Likewise, Buhre and Josefsson (2024) have found that, even today, younger advocates, especially those under 18, face particular difficulties in securing funding and/or legal permissions to attend COP, and specifically for international travel. As a consequence, older or more privileged youth find it easier to attend climate summits, and this can impact the types of voices heard. In 2023 it was found that representatives under the age of 26 years constitute less than 5 per cent of party delegates at COPs (Youth Delegate Search, 2023). Examining space and child/youth participation through the lens of the child/youth climate justice movement illuminates that although there is an increasing number of younger generations involved in participatory process, young children are often excluded or not given the space to participate equally and have their voices heard.

Research indicates that in the early years, many education programmes typically focus on learning in and about nature, without addressing 'issues of mitigation and adaptation, the use of technology or the implementation of actions and solutions' (Spiteri, 2023, 12). It is rare that younger children are engaged in any way in the crucial political decision-making processes involved in the climate crisis, despite the fact they equally have the right to be heard. Spiteri emphasises that research suggests that not just older children, but young children too, are capable of engaging in climate action. They must be provided with opportunities that acknowledge their voices and agency, and share the same experience with others so that together with adults (e.g. teachers and parents/caregivers), they may feel empowered to communicate their views and to take climate action (Spiteri, 2023: 12).

4.2 Voice

The second element, *Voice*, refers to the facilitation of the child's ability to express their views freely and in their own way. Article 12 affords this right to all children, 'capable of forming their own views', which should not be assumed to be dependent on the age and maturity of the child. Rather, it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not (Lundy, 2007). As expressed by Correia *et al.* (2022), promoting children's voice also requires (a) providing information tailored to the children's age, language, culture, physical and cognitive skills; (b) selecting relevant and interesting topics for children to be involved in; (c) enabling multiple forms of expressing views; and (d) building children's capacity to express views, interests and preferences. This aligns with recommendations from children themselves, who during the 2002 UN Special Summit on Children's Rights highlighted the need for time, support and varied modes of engagement to enable meaningful participation (Lundy, 2007). Valuing all children's contributions (such as those made during a class presentation), drawing on their previous experiences (such as those shared during group discussions), using engaging materials (such as toys), and allowing time for children to express themselves creatively through, for example, photography, drawings or role play, to present new ideas, initiating projects, and introducing topics to peers or adults, are examples of relevant practices for enabling young children's voices (Correia *et al.*, 2022; Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014; Formosinho and Araújo, 2007; Hill, 2006).

Children's voices are being heard in a more prominent way because of the work of young climate advocates. It is theorised that the voices of children are now expected to be heard more, and they are mainstreamed more, because of the changed perceptions of children due to their climate action (Daly *et al.*, 2024). This mainstreaming of children's voices points to the positioning of young climate advocates as the equals of adults – a key part of postpaternalism. Climate litigation is a valuable avenue through which the stories of children and youth in the climate crisis can be heard. The mainstreaming of children's voices is perhaps evident in the fact that one third of human rights-based climate cases now has child and youth involvement (Jodoin and Wewerinke-Singh, 2025). These cases foreground the stories of children and youth who are affected by the climate crisis in very present and practical ways. The children and young people in the Duarte (2020) petition outlined how the present effects of the climate crisis cause them mental distress. They describe, for example, missing school and sports due to heat waves, and they argue that they have a lot of anxiety about the future.

The mainstreaming of children's voices in environmental matters affecting them also appears evident from the significant involvement of children in the

drafting of General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change. In Daly *et al.* (forthcoming 2025) the authors (including two members of the General Comment No. 26 children's advisory team), emphasise the importance of General Comment No. 26 for children. The General Comment refers to the impact of the environmental crisis on children's rights. It also outlines the actions that governments, businesses and others should take to uphold these rights. From the beginning, child/youth action had a significant role in its development in a way that has not been experienced with the drafting of previous general comments by the Committee. The drafting process was highly participatory, incorporating input from over 16,000 children worldwide on how environmental degradation affects their lives and what measures should be taken to address it. Twelve Child Advisors were recruited to advise the Committee. Then 12-year-old Colombian and experienced environmental activist Francisco Manzanares was a member of the Child Advisory Team (CAT). He outlined in 2022 how he has an environmental movement called Guardians por la Vida (Guardians for Life) consisting of 700 young people from Latin America:

Well, I think it has been a very nice experience. What I like most about it is that it is a committee, a very diverse team from all over the world. And there are children. We are children who raise our voices, are committed to human rights, to our rights. Well, in general, that's it! It is a very nice team, and we are working together for this General Comment No. 26.

CERI, 2022

Participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination and encourage opportunities for marginalised children to be involved. Another important part of the voice component is that children from different backgrounds are heard in matters affecting them. The principle of nondiscrimination is a strong feature of the postpaternalism of youth climate action (Daly *et al.*, 2024). The worst effects of the climate crisis affect some groups much more significantly than others. For example, Indigenous people are amongst the worst affected by the climate crisis. This is a point that has been included in youth climate cases, for example in the *Sacchi* petition, in which it is stated: '[C]limate change has a unique impact on indigenous children, whose close connection to nature and dependence on wildlife and plants are integral to their livelihoods and their spiritual and cultural practices' (para. 92). Thus, the youth climate justice movement highlights how the voices of children and youth are diverse; even though younger generations face the brunt of the climate crisis and will continue to live with the impacts longer,

there are some groups of children who will feel the impact even more. These voices must be listened to and considered in the context of child/youth participation on various socioeconomic and environmental issues.

The Lundy model emphasises that discrimination may limit genuine participation (Lundy, 2007). It is crucial to ask, therefore, who has a voice in youth climate action? There is an increasing awareness, for example, that on youth advisory boards, it is necessary to recruit those from different backgrounds (Reid, 2024b). It was understood that there was sometimes a lack of transparency and fair representation on Youth Advisory Boards. But it appears that particular care is now being taken to ensure fair representation and, in some instances, this is coming from the area of youth climate action. This was an important feature, for example, of the global Children's Advisory Team for the development of the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 26 (Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, 2023). Also, at the Youth Climate Justice project 2023–2028 at University College Cork (which examines child youth climate action inside and outside the courts),⁴ a child/youth advisory group has been established. Twelve Young Advisors were chosen, taking into account each region of the world. As Reid outlines, we wanted to: 'be extra mindful that we had a diverse range of applicants, including much younger children, those with different abilities, those for whom English is not their first language', and once that was done, we cross-checked the balance of age, gender, country, regions, languages spoken, abilities and experiences, to ensure a broad range of abilities and experiences (Reid, 2024b). Among youth advisory boards, as a platform for amplifying the voices of children/youth, it is also important to include those who may not be considered "experts" on the climate crisis (based on their previous leadership experiences, for example) to ensure that the voices of all children/youth are represented in these spaces.

In many contexts of environmental decision-making, however, children are left unheard. In a UNICEF report on the involvement of children/youth in climate and environment policy making, they found that only a miniscule 12 per cent of children were actually heard in relation to their views and experiences (UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, when children and youth *do* access processes (such as COP), they can be left disappointed about their involvement. The Committee emphasises that Article 12 requires the avoidance of tokenistic approaches, whereby children are included, but their views are not given due weight (2009, para. 132). Thew *et al.* point out that participation of children and youth in climate governance can be tokenistic and lack meaningful

4 The Youth Climate Justice project 2023–2028: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/youthclimatejustice/>.

consideration of their views and wishes (Thew *et al.*, 2020). Young participants can also be left burned out, overwhelmed and frustrated by their participation at COP (Paz Landeira *et al.*, this issue). Buhre and Josefsson (2024: 431) describe the views of Christopher, a youth representative from South America attending COY16. He comments on how financial support to Indigenous youth to attend both opens pathways to the summits, but also risks tokenism:

[T]hey had like this party, it had like this Indigenous girl from Brazil singing. It felt like offensive because they didn't help us at any point and did not make any effort to bring people from Indigenous communities to this kind of space ... but they love to bring like one member of Indigenous community and put them to sing and say: 'how inclusive we are'.

The authors comment: 'Christopher is here voicing a critique against exoticising Indigenous representatives, but also points to the economic dimension of the "one is enough" logic and its implications for representing youth.' It is crucial that children's voices are heard in matters relating to climate law, policy and practice, that those most affected by climate change are included, and that tokenism is avoided.

The voice of children and youth is also restricted in certain types of participation due to contextual factors. For example, the rise of climate protests and strikes – a common vehicle of participation for young people around the world – originated in North Europe as a 'progressive childhood-climate movement, highlighting children's power and rights'; however, children and young people in East Asia are restricted from participating in such protests for reasons that come at the intersection of culture, adult intervention and a lack of awareness for different participatory rights (Chang, 2022, 8). This example shows that the voices of children/youth can be restricted due to political factors which prevent them from participating in environmental matters.

4.3 Audience

Having a voice is insufficient unless there is a committed *audience* to receive it. Audience refers to the right of the child to be listened to and express their views to those involved in the decision-making processes (Lundy, 2007). The existence of an engaged audience and of recognisable adults with the responsibility to listen and show that children's perspectives matter, are necessary preconditions to make children's voices visible and heard (Correia *et al.*, 2022; Johnson, 2017; Macnamara, 2013).

Effective audience engagement requires active listening skills, responsiveness to non-verbal cues, and adaptation to preferred ways of communicating.

Formalising different channels of communication for children – such as consultations or school council meetings – could reinforce that participation is taken seriously and prevent tokenism (Lundy, 2007). Ensuring that children have an audience for their views can also require engaging the wider community. It is important to identify who holds decision-making power within the community – such as local authorities – so that children's perspectives can be taken into account (Council of Europe, 2020). This process benefits from active cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, including families, community services and local governments, who are encouraged to work together to support and amplify children's voices (Correia *et al.*, 2022).

When it comes to young climate action, the audiences which children and youth have been reaching have been one of the most transformative participation features. Children and youth have perhaps never reached the most powerful politicians and change makers to such a degree before young climate action. In Germany, for instance, Angela Merkel credited the youth climate movement with influencing the country's environmental policies, including the introduction of a new carbon pricing initiative (Egenter and Wehrmann, 2019).

One example of ensuring children's views reach a responsive audience is Ireland's Youth Assembly on Climate, held in 2019. In advance of a UN General Assembly event marking the 30th anniversary of the CRC, the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) and UNICEF Ireland advocated for a structured and sustainable mechanism to ensure that young people's voices on climate issues could be heard at the highest levels of decision-making. Responding to this call, the Irish Government collaborated with UNICEF and RTÉ, the national public broadcaster, to convene the Youth Assembly in partnership with the Irish Parliament. The event brought together 157 children and young people aged 10 to 17 from across the country to deliberate on the climate crisis and present their views in a high-profile, policy-influencing forum. By creating a direct link between children and national decision-makers, this initiative demonstrated a concrete commitment to providing children with a meaningful and impactful audience (Daly and Lundy, 2022).

The UN has increasingly become a critical audience for youth climate advocacy, offering a global platform where young people's voices can be heard by those with the power to shape international policy (UN, 2023). Initiatives such as the UN Youth Delegate Programme, the UN Youth Climate Summits, and the creation of the UN Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, reflect the organisation's growing commitment to integrating youth perspectives into climate governance (UN, 2019). Notably, youth-led organisations and activists – such as Greta Thunberg, Vanessa Nakate and youth

representatives from the Fridays for Future movement – have addressed high-level forums including the UN General Assembly and COP summits, demanding urgent action on the climate crisis (Breeze, 2019; Gahanan, 2019; Jordans, 2021). These interventions not only raise global awareness but also target a uniquely positioned audience with the mandate to coordinate transnational responses (UN, 2024). Within the framework of the Lundy Model, the UN exemplifies an ideal audience: a body with both the responsibility and the capacity to respond to young people's calls for action. By directing their advocacy toward UN institutions, young climate activists are engaging with a forum that has the authority to influence global agendas and foster accountability among member States, demonstrating the strategic importance of aligning children's voices with powerful and responsive audiences.

The audience of private businesses is important when it comes to environmental work, considering the impact that businesses, and particularly large corporations, have on the environment. Young climate advocates have had some success in this regard. In India, Aditya Mukarji at age 13 years began convincing businesses in New Delhi to reject straws; ultimately preventing the use of half a million of them (CBBC, 2019). He states: 'People listen more to children bringing up environmental concerns.' Similarly, UK sisters Ella and Amy Meek are fighting against plastic pollution, starting their "Kids Against Plastic" initiative in 2016 at the ages of 10 and 12. They have launched campaign initiatives with over 1,000 schools and over 50 cafés, businesses and festivals.⁵ Further, the children and youth who contributed to General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment and the subsequent Children's Global Charter directed their calls to action to governments *and* businesses, demonstrating that businesses are recognised as an important audience in order to affect change.

Sometimes however, audiences do not always consider the concerns and opinions of young climate advocates as seriously as they should. Emilia in Peru is a member of the Youth Climate Justice young advisory team, and a climate litigant. She was inspired to join climate litigation by a story of a Peruvian girl swept away by a *hualco*, a violent mudslide triggered by *El Niño*, a recurring climate phenomenon. She wondered why the government kept failing to prevent its devastating effects:

I joined this lawsuit in 2019. Now, in 2025, I can say with certainty that Peru's justice system is not built for children. We are often dismissed, like in a past hearing when a government lawyer called our case a mere "school

5 <https://earth.org/young-climate-activists-leading-the-way-on-global-climate-action/>.

project.” Or in media coverage of our first press conference, where adults in the comments assumed we were being manipulated, as if children couldn’t possibly understand what is at stake. But they do. Children understood when they lost their homes to a *huaico*.

EMILIA, 2025

Children and youth now have a wider audience than ever before as they access the Internet, the media, politicians and spaces of power and influence such as the UN. If poor attitudes to children and youth persist, however, they will clearly struggle to be taken seriously by their audience.

4.4 *Influence*

The final element, *Influence*, focuses on accountability to children – their views should have an impact. It can be a challenge, when implementing a child’s right to participate, to ensure that adults go beyond the “voice” component. They must take children’s views seriously and they must be open to being influenced by them (Lundy 2007). The term “influence” in the Lundy Model includes the concept of “due weight” as expressed in CRC Article 12. States are required not only to ‘listen’ to children’s views but to give them due weight in accordance with age and maturity. This presents a complex balancing act, as adults often retain discretion in determining the significance of children’s input. Lundy (2007, 930) adds that:

The challenge is to find ways of ensuring that adults not only listen to children but that they take children’s views seriously. While this cannot be universally guaranteed, one incentive/safeguard is to ensure that children are told how their views were considered. Often children are asked for their views and then not told what became of them; that is, whether they had any *influence* or not.

Thus, there is a need for a generous, child-empowering interpretation of evolving capacities, which can be supported by providing children with guidance and direction in accordance with Article 5 of the CRC. Article 3 – the best interests principle – is also of significance in this regard to ensure adults do not restrict children’s course of action on the basis that they know ‘what is best for them’ (Lundy, 2007). This requires: (a) taking action on children’s views, as appropriate, (b) intentionally planning and structuring opportunities for children to have influence, (c) offering various levels at which children can exert influence, (d) tracking and evaluating the impact of their input, and

(e) providing feedback to children about how their views were considered (Correia *et al.*, 2022).

Through their awareness raising, there is evidence that young climate advocates have successfully pressured governments and sometimes corporations to take action. In various assemblies, children have produced “calls to action” or recommendations coming out of their work together. In Ireland’s Child and Youth Biodiversity Assembly, 58 calls to action were included in the final report. It included six key messages:

1. We must treat the earth like a member of the family or a friend.
2. Future generations must live in a world where there isn’t a biodiversity crisis and where children don’t have to take action because of the inaction of past generations.
3. Every decision must take biodiversity into account.
4. Children and young people must be included in decisions being made about biodiversity.
5. Biodiversity protection must be a shared responsibility and a global, collaborative effort.
6. We must consume resources in a sustainable, moderate way that neither diminishes the environment/biodiversity or our rights, wellbeing and livelihoods.

It is possible that these outcomes could be argued to be “voice” rather than “influence”, as it is not always clear that such recommendations had a direct impact on laws/policies, or on the environment itself. However, these outcomes appear to be influential in a number of ways. In the case of Ireland’s assembly, for example, Deane *et al.* (this issue) outline how these recommendations fed into the Irish Government’s Fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP, 2024). Deane *et al.* also outline that another outcome of the assembly was that Assembly members co-created educational resources based on the Calls to Action relating to education in their final recommendation document (including a Biodiversity Activity Book). This feeds into a crucial element of Article 12 – the Committee emphasises that children must be informed about matters affecting them (2009, para. 25).

Children and youth also seem to have significant influence on the drafting of General Comment No. 26. As mentioned in the *Introduction* of the General Comment, the Committee recognises that the environmental action taken by children and youth motivated the initiative to create a General Comment to provide guidance on how the environment and children’s rights relate. Thus, the General Comment itself is an example of the influence children and youth climate activists are having on a global scale. The instrument has a strong emphasis on children’s right to be heard on matters affecting them, and it refers

to the way in which the exercise by children of their rights can result in more rights compliant, ambitious and effective, environmental policies. In particular, it refers to including those of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, to information and education, to participate and be heard, and to effective remedies. Child and youth participation can improve and strengthen environmental policies, as it provides input from groups with their own expertise on many issues, including their experiences of their environments.

One criticism of CRC Article 12, however, is that it is possible for adults to engage in consultation, but ultimately to ignore children's views (Molloy, 2022). Tokenistic or decorative participation is not only in breach of Article 12, but can be counterproductive. Some children and youth are left frustrated with their participation in various processes through which they can seek to search their environmental rights. Climate litigation is one avenue of climate action where a failure to influence can be particularly frustrating for children. They may be fortunate enough to access these processes, but it does not guarantee that they will have the influence that they seek (Daly, 2024). The Committee declined in *Sacchi* fully to consider a climate petition by applicant children, as they had not exhausted domestic remedies. There was much anger expressed by the applicants. Raina Ivanova, one of the 16 youth who had brought the case forward, said: 'I feel extremely left alone by the Committee on the Rights of the Child [the] UN body who is supposed to help uphold our rights' (Hausfeld and Earthjustice, 2021). Because of the fact that there are no guarantees that children and youth will get the outcome that they wish when they take on climate litigation, it is particularly important there is space to ensure that young plaintiffs are prepared for this potentially disappointing outcome. When engaging in initiatives or applications with children and young people, it is crucial that legal professionals and other adults do significant preparation work to manage the expectations of children and young people about what they can expect in such processes (Daly *et al.*, 2024). Managing expectations is essential as spaces become more welcoming and encouraging of hearing and listening to children/youth voices, and finding other ways to translate this influence is needed.

In the *Sacchi* case, although the outcome was not what the children had wanted, the Committee published an open letter to the applicant children emphasising the importance and influence of their petition. The Committee provides in the letter a 'simplified explanation of the case' expressing hope that the children will be 'empowered by the positive aspects of this decision'.⁶ The children are also encouraged by the Committee to use the explanation of

6 See, "Open letter to the authors": https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Open_letter_on_climate_change.pdf. Accessed 2 July 2025.

the case contained in the letter to communicate the letter to other children and young people. The Committee explains in the letter that the children's application did not overcome procedural hurdles, and explained the reasons why this case was successful in many ways (Liefwaard, 2021).

It does appear, however, more broadly that children and youth are having a significant impact on the law through their climate applications and cases. In the *Sacchi* petition, the Committee broke new ground in its response, by stating that it was possible for States to cause transboundary harm (Daly, 2023). Also, there are over 52 substantive climate applications and cases by youth,⁷ and it appears that over half of these had a successful or partially successful outcome in terms of court orders of benefits to the environment (Daly, forthcoming, 2025). In *Navahine v. Hawai'i Department of Transportation*, young advocates have succeeded through legal action in Hawai'i in their efforts to achieve zero emissions across all modes of transportation no later than 2045 (Rogers *et al.*, this issue). In *Youth Verdict v. Waratah Coal* (Australia), statutory human rights frameworks were used to empower youth to halt extractive industry projects. In the South African case, *African Climate Alliance v. Minister of Mineral Resources* (“#CancelCoal”), children's rights arguments were used to dismantle fossil fuel expansion plans. In *Woodpecker v. Republic of Korea* (South Korea), constitutional limits were placed on national climate targets to protect future generations.

It is not always straightforward to analyse directly the impact and influence of youth climate action, especially considering that the goal of many climate youth activists is to drive deep systemic and structural change which does not happen overnight. However, it does appear that one significant impact is that public perceptions of children and youth, and the agency that they can exercise on political issues, is accepted to a greater extent than it was before the youth climate justice movement became a worldwide phenomenon in 2018 (Daly *et al.*, 2024). While the direct impact and influence of increased participation of children and youth in environmental spaces is not always reflected in policy and practice, it is likely to improve the participation of children and youth more broadly across other areas affecting them in the years to come.

5 Conclusion

CRC Article 12 stipulates that children have a right to be heard in all matters affecting them, and the right for their views to be given due weight. The

⁷ Youth Climate Justice caselaw database: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/youthclimatejustice/caselawdatabase/>. Accessed 2 July 2025.

Lundy Model can help to conceptualise participation in climate action and initiatives. The model particularly emphasises the importance of asking questions regarding the most appropriate means of providing children/youth with space, in ways that are ethical and underpinned by the best interests of the child (Molloy, 2022). The model also focuses attention on the way children are heard, which children are heard, who is hearing them, and what influences their voices have.

There is evidence that child/youth climate action is having an influence in climate policy and in how the world sees children/youth. Such action is changing the regular processes and activities at COP, progressing the law, causing a shift in international human rights law towards an approach which better encompasses a more holistic approach and better acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans in their environments (Daly, 2022, 2), and many other impacts. Children and youth are engaging in strategic use of human rights language and institutions. They are, for example, presenting climate complaints to the Committee, taking cases at domestic level, and engaging in COP. This indicates that children, once excluded from legal and political spheres, can leverage domestic and international fora to defend the environment and their own futures. As a result, young climate action is redefining what child participation means in the context of climate change. It is also influencing how children's rights more broadly are being defined and shaped.

There is postpaternalism in some of the distinct elements to child/youth climate action. One feature of young climate action is that children and youth have accessed spaces in a way they have not before. There are now youth liaising at high level UN fora. It seems that the voices of children are now expected to be heard more, because of the changed perceptions of children due to their climate action. Another distinct feature of young climate action is that children have spontaneously created their *own* spaces – protesting in the streets in large numbers, for example, via the #fridaysforfuture movement (Daly *et al.*, 2024) and the youth who prompted the Dakota pipeline action (Daly, 2022). There is a self-led and independent nature to much of their work, particularly street protests. Children and youth have managed to find ways to use their voice, even where the space is not there. Space created by initiatives like the biodiversity assembly are adult-led. But the advent of phenomena such as child/youth advisory groups ensure that children are leading on children's rights projects, even where they involve spaces created by adults. Children were a key part of the drafting of General Comment No. 26 (Daly *et al.*, forthcoming, 2025).

Nondiscrimination is another key element, whereby young climate advocates themselves point to the need for voices from the Global South.

Nondiscrimination is being embedded in the creation of young advisory boards. When we look at audience and influence (Lundy, 2007), we can also see evidence of enhanced participation. Many of the audiences which young climate advocates have been reaching have been extensive (e.g. online) and more high-level (e.g. at the UN). Children are having an influence which arguably they have not had until climate action – climate cases are, more often than not, successful in at least some of the aims sought. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has engaged in progressive approaches because of *Sacchi*, setting precedents and publishing an open letter to the applicant children.

Whilst the opening up of traditionally adult spaces to children and youth is undoubtedly positive, there appears to be a time lag, however, in terms of ensuring these spaces are child/youth friendly. Young participants can be left frustrated by their participation at COP, for example (Paz Landeira *et al.*, this issue). Lloyd and Emerson (2017, 595) highlight that ‘adults are positioned in the CRC as “enablers” capable of playing a positive role in guiding and assisting children in the formation and expression of their views’. It is an important part of participation, therefore, that adults create spaces from which children can be heard. It is crucial to make them safe; the *Sharma* case appears to be a good practice example, whereby lawyers worked with young litigants to prepare them for the work in which they engaged. Children and youth are feeding into domestic and regional processes to inform COP (e.g. RCOY LATAM 2023).

In many contexts of environmental decision-making children are left unheard. Young climate advocates, including protestors, have often experienced a lack of acceptance that they have civil and political rights. Furthermore, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and younger children, can be excluded from spaces such as COP. There are still instances of children feeling like they are not taken seriously in their advocacy for the planet (e.g. Emilia, 2025), and social media can involve bullying of young advocates. There is much work to be done to ensure spaces are safe for children and youth.

Thus, there are particular elements of participation which must be considered when it comes to child/youth climate action. Adult allies must work with children and youth to ensure that these youth-created spaces are supported. Much work must be done also to ensure that spaces which are suddenly being accessed by children and youth are in fact child-friendly, such as COP (Paz Landeira, this issue) and the legal processes related to climate cases (Daly, 2024). Lundy emphasises that the power of children’s participation lies in its ‘capacity to harness the wisdom, authenticity and currency of children’s lived experience in order to effect change’ (Lundy, 2007). It is crucial that the voices of children/youth are heard in matters relating to climate law, policy

and practice, that spaces are child-friendly and that their views are acted upon in this postpaternal era.

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