



**FINAL REPORT**

# **CLIMATE (IN)JUSTICE: HOW CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECTS CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

**CFJ-EN ANNUAL SEMINAR 2024**





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## Acknowledgments

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## About the CFJ-EN

The [Child Friendly Justice European Network](#) (CFJ-EN) was launched in 2019 informally by the Europe sections of Defence for Children International. Thanks to the formalisation of a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Union, the CFJ-EN has been fully operational since April 2022. The CFJ-EN has, as of September 2023, 36 members in 21 countries in Europe. Its members include civil society organisations, research institutes and individual experts.

The purpose of the CFJ-EN is to federate organisations across Europe, influence policies and legislations and disseminate information in relation to CFJ at European regional and national levels. The vision for the future is that children in Europe have access to age appropriate, inclusive and diligent services and practitioners equipped to implement child friendly justice. To implement this vision, it bases its work on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and aims to support the implementation of the Council of Europe Guidelines on child friendly justice, the European Directives on procedural safeguards and on victim's rights, as well as other key European instruments.

The CFJ-EN aims to:



**Strengthen children's agency**, by promoting meaningful and inclusive participation of children and young people and making practitioners working with children understand the importance of child participation.



**Promote quality of practice**, by increasing capacities of legal and non-legal practitioners who work with children and sharing knowledge and expertise across Europe on child-friendly justice.



**Ensure accountability**, by informing European policy makers and making them aware of inspiring practices and informing national policy makers and making them aware of latest developments in child-friendly justice.



**Strengthen the network**, by strengthening the capacities of the Network to communicate on and promote child-friendly justice and mobilising support to members and fostering collaborations across Europe towards effective access to justice for children.

## 1. Introduction

On 10 and 11 October 2024, the Child Friendly Justice European Network (CFJ-EN) held its third Annual Seminar in Brussels (Belgium), in partnership with Terre des hommes Foundation (Tdh) and its Global Initiative for Justice with Children, and Universities CICS.NOVA and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

The seminar brought together a total of 171 participants, including child rights and climate experts, academics, students, a group of six young activists to explore how climate change imposes structural pressures on justice systems, affecting their capacity to uphold children's rights. The event welcomed the participation of a 50 VUB students, and 14 students from a Belgian secondary school. Discussions focused on key themes, including the role of strategic climate litigation in advancing children's environmental rights, safeguarding children and young people freedom of association and peaceful assembly to enable meaningful climate advocacy, and understanding how climate change impacts justice systems and crimes involving or affecting children. Together, these discussions highlighted the urgent need to ensure children's access to justice in the context of the climate crisis.

### Background and context of the seminar

In a world navigating unprecedented challenges, the vulnerabilities of children have become increasingly apparent from economic, geopolitical, and health crises. The confluence of these adversities intersects with the overarching threat of climate change, as outlined in the United Nations 2030 agenda. This complex scenario not only magnifies the vulnerability of children but places an immense burden on justice systems initially designed to safeguard their well-being. The multifaceted crises underscore the imperative to scrutinise the intricate relationship between all children's human rights, including environmental rights, the climate crisis, and the resilience of justice mechanisms for children.

In Europe, all countries are exposed to adverse impacts of climate change, notably affecting their children and youth, emphasising the critical need to align national climate action ambitions with comprehensive child justice reforms. While the UN Committee on the Rights issued in 2023 its General Comment 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change and is currently developing General Comment 27 on access to justice and remedies for children, time seems opportune to integrate child justice into the broader agendas of international and European institutions, ensuring a holistic and synergistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by children in the wake of global crises, including:

- guaranteeing access to justice for children in the climate crisis context with a specific focus on strategic climate litigation and right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly;
- examining how climate change puts structural pressure on child justice systems.

The seminar provides an opportunity to draw attention to the diverse situations and challenges children face due to the impact of climate change while seeking access to justice and legal remedies. This reflection forms part of the preparations for the upcoming [World Congress on Justice with Children](#), which will be organised by the Global Initiative on Justice with Children in June 2025 in Madrid. It builds on the recommendations outlined in Tdh's report "[Climate Injustice for Children: How the Climate Crisis Affects Access to Justice and Children's Rights](#)", published in October 2023 in partnership with the Global Initiative on Justice with Children.

## Objectives and goals

The overarching objective of the seminar was to put [General Comment 26 on children's rights and the environment](#) into practice. This involved promoting the human rights of children affected by the consequences of climate change and fostering opportunities for collaboration among national and regional stakeholders to ensure that these children can effectively access justice in Europe. As a catalyst for collaboration, the seminar served as a platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and the identification of actionable strategies to strengthen child justice in the context of the climate crisis.

The specific objectives of the annual seminar were to:

1. Assess the multifaceted impact of climate change on child justice systems, considering legal, social, and environmental dimensions.
2. Facilitate in-depth discussions on impact litigation strategies aimed at safeguarding children's environmental rights and empowering children to access justice.
3. Address the critical issue of non-criminalisation of children's rights to peaceful assembly, particularly in the context of climate-related activism.
4. Examine the potential impact of climate change on children in contact with justice systems, with a focus on preventive and adaptive measures.
5. Explore innovative approaches to enhance children's access to justice in environmental matters, with a particular emphasis on child participation.

## Overview of participants and key stakeholders

The seminar brought together a diverse group of participants, including members of the network (CFJ-EN), children and young people with lived experience of the justice system and environmental challenges, representatives from European and regional institutions, national public bodies, and practitioners and academics specialising in law, social work, sociology, and environmental issues. Also were present representatives from regional alliances and European and global networks focused on child justice and climate change.

## Agenda overview

The seminar took place over two days, on 10 and 11 October, preceded by a cinema-debate session in central Brussels on the evening of 9 October. Discussions were structured around five plenary sessions featuring distinguished speakers and young activists, alongside smaller group discussions held through eight dedicated workshops.



The key themes included inclusive and meaningful participation, emphasising the importance of children’s involvement as a fundamental right; support for marginalised groups, focusing on addressing the heightened vulnerabilities of children facing disproportionate climate impacts; and mental health and activism, exploring the emotional challenges young activists encounter while balancing their advocacy and personal well-being.

For more information, see [Agenda of the Seminar](#) and [List of Speakers and Bios](#); see below for the content of the workshops.



## 2. Planet B: Debate with a young activist in Belgium

The *Ciné-Débat* session on 9 October 2024 at Cinéma Aventure welcomed 99 participants including participants to the seminar, young activists and the general public. It featured the screening of ***Planet B*** (2023), a poignant documentary by director Pieter Van Eecke that follows the life of Bo Vanhoorickx, a teenage climate activist. The film captures their journey over four years as they balance a growing involvement in Extinction Rebellion with the challenges of adolescence, including mental health struggles and questions of identity. Through Bo Vanhoorickx's perspective, the documentary highlights the personal and societal costs of climate activism, exploring themes such as police encounters, familial bonds, and the search for a sense of purpose. Following the screening, a rich debate unfolded with **Pieter Van Eecke**, filmmaker, **Bo Vanhoorickx**, the young activist, and **Elisa Morgera**, UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights, moderated by **Nantina Tsekeri**, vice-chair of the CFJ-EN and Director of DCI Greece. The discussion delved into the intersections of activism, children's rights, and the importance of creating supportive spaces for young changemakers.

A key theme addressed was the impact of activism on mental health. Bo Vanhoorickx reflected on the difficulty of maintaining balance, sharing how activism, though empowering, can lead to burnout and feelings of isolation, as experienced by their friend Luca. They underscored the importance of setting boundaries and viewing activism not only as a means of achieving systemic change but as a personal growth journey. The discussion exposed the troubling treatment of young activists by police, with Bo Vanhoorickx and their peers recounting experiences of arrest and detention that disregarded their rights as children. Elisa Morgera condemned such violations, emphasising that youth-led activism should be respected, not repressed. Despite these challenges, Bo Vanhoorickx spoke of activism as a "safe space" where they found community and support, particularly from their mother and the Extinction Rebellion group.

The documentary and debate left the audience with important reflections on the role of activism in today's world. Pieter Van Eecke noted his aim to dispel stereotypes about young protesters, portraying their dedication and humanity. Elisa Morgera highlighted the power of storytelling and art in bridging division and inspiring collective action. *Planet B* not only challenges misconceptions about young activists but also invites viewers to reflect on their own role in addressing climate injustice. The session underscored the resilience of young people like Bo Vanhoorickx, who refuse indifference and choose courage in the face of a global crisis.

### 3. Plenary summaries

#### Day 1 - 10 October 2024

##### Opening words

**Mariama Diallo**, Coordinator, Child Friendly Justice European Network, Belgium  
**Benoît Van Keirsbilck**, President, Child Friendly Justice European Network & Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Belgium  
**Marta Gil**, Deputy Head Justice Programmes, Terre des hommes Foundation, Switzerland  
**Els Dumortier**, Professor in Youth Criminology, Vrije Universiteit Belgium

The speakers opened the seminar by highlighting the key challenges faced by child climate activists. Among these, **Benoît Van Keirsbilck** raised the issue of State repression of peaceful protests, where activists are often criminalised and arrested, as well as society's reluctance to engage with their messages, preferring silence over confronting uncomfortable truths. **Marta Gil** emphasised how climate change threatens fundamental human and children's rights, affecting health, family stability, and mobility, and how it exacerbates conflicts, leaving lasting environmental devastation.

In this introduction, speakers stressed the urgent need for justice and legal support, calling for access to fair legal strategies for criminalised activists and the use of legal systems to demand stronger governmental climate action. Finally, **Els Dumortier** highlighted the importance of fostering an open dialogue on climate change and society's response, particularly in underexplored areas such as youth criminology, in order to better protect future generations from escalating threats. This set the stage for a deeper exploration of the broader implications of these critical issues.

##### Opening address

**Marie-Cécile Rouillon**, Coordinator on the Rights of the Child, European Commission  
**Ann Skelton**, Chair, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (video message)

The introductory speeches were followed by an opening address by **Marie-Cécile Rouillon** and a video message from **Ann Skelton**. Ann Skelton notably mentioned the General comment 26 on children's rights and the environment, and how it notes that although children's rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, some rights are particularly threatened by environmental degradation, while others play an instrumental role in safeguarding children's rights in relation to the environment. She also insisted on the committee's next General Comment 27 on access to justice and remedies for children, that could be fed by the outcomes of this seminar in the consultation process. The discussion emphasised the need to protect children from the disproportionate impacts of climate change, including transboundary harm, while empowering

them to contribute meaningfully. This requires upholding their rights, creating accessible, child-friendly complaint mechanisms and appropriate remedies, and holding governments accountable by removing barriers to justice.

## Setting the Scene

**Elisa Morgera**, UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights, Professor of Global Environmental Law at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow (UK) and Adjunct Professor in International and European Union Environmental Law at the University of Eastern Finland

**Oskar Bonte**, Young Climate Activist, Belgium

**Benjamin Van Bunderen Robberechts**, Young Climate Activist, Belgium

*Moderation: Mariama Diallo, Coordinator, Child Friendly Justice European Network, Belgium*

The first panel discussion explored the critical roles and objectives of children and young people in addressing climate change, alongside the urgent need to protect activists working to safeguard the planet. Panellists emphasised the importance of empowering children and youth by involving them directly in decision-making processes, such as child-friendly advisory boards that amplify their voices and priorities. Structural involvement, particularly within organisations like the United Nations, and especially at events like COP, was considered essential by **Elisa Morgera** and **Benjamin Van Bunderen Robberechts**, given the disproportionate climate impacts that younger generations is facing and will face.

The discussion highlighted the need to adapt communication methods to be more child-friendly, using creative and empathetic approaches to make information both accessible and engaging. **Oskar Bonte** insisted on the importance of a child-friendly language in building more trust in youth. Panellists advocated for experimenting with innovative practices to better integrate child and youth perspectives and to reform traditional systems that hinder their meaningful participation.

The panel addressed the increasing risks faced by child and young climate activists, advocating for environmental and human rights. Panellists stressed the importance of connecting and strengthening protection mechanisms to support activists, particularly Indigenous communities, and emphasised the vital role of collaboration in building a unified response to shared threats.

## Plenary 1 - State of Play in Europe – The Impact of Climate Change on Children’s Rights

**Marie-Cécile Rouillon**, Coordinator on the Rights of the Child, European Commission  
**Regina Jensdottir**, Head of Children’s Rights Division, Council of Europe  
**Elisa Morgera**, UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights, Professor of Global Environmental Law at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow (UK) and Adjunct Professor in International and European Union Environmental Law at the University of Eastern Finland  
**Gábor Kiss**, Young Climate Activist, Hungary  
**Benjamin Van Bunderen Robberechts**, Young Climate Activist, Belgium  
*Moderation: **Marine Braun**, Child Rights Expert, Portugal*

The plenary discussion focused on the urgent need to address the intertwined challenges of climate change, activism, and children’s rights. Activism was defined as meaningful community action, with climate change framed as a human and economic crisis disproportionately affecting children. Despite being both the present and the future, children’s voices are often overlooked in policymaking dominated by adults and corporate interests. The discussion called for stronger efforts to amplify children’s perspectives and ensure their inclusion in decision-making.

Ensuring meaningful participation requires creating safe, inclusive spaces where children feel empowered. Leaders such as **Marie-Cécile Rouillon** (European Commission) and **Regina Jensdottir** (Council of Europe) championed child participation as a core right, highlighting structures like the EU Children’s Participation Platform. Panellists stressed the importance of legal standards and organisational responsibility to safeguard children physically and emotionally, even amidst anxieties about making mistakes. Innovative approaches like art-based engagement and gradual, transformative changes were recommended to institutionalise child participation and shift cultural mindsets.

Support for child activists emerged as a key concern. Many rely on family, peers, and NGOs, while governmental and political support often falls short. Activists face significant emotional and financial burdens, highlighting the need for simplified systems, and interdisciplinary support and research to alleviate these pressures. While legal mechanisms are crucial, broader strategies combining advocacy, education, and collaboration are necessary to protect children’s rights and empower their activism.

In conclusion, the discussion emphasised the importance of centring children’s voices in climate action. Protecting young activists, fostering inclusive participation, and creating child-friendly systems are essential steps. Children must be recognised not only as the future but as participants in addressing the climate crisis today.

## Plenary 2 - The Legitimacy of Children in Defending their Rights

**Aoife Daly**, Professor of Law, Cork University, Ireland

**Helmut Sax**, Legal Researcher, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Fundamental and Human Rights, Austria

**Gerry Liston**, Climate Lawyer, Global Legal Action Network, United Kingdom

**Cláudia Duarte Agostinho**, Young Climate Activist, Portugal

**Martim Duarte Agostinho**, Young Climate Activist, Portugal

*Moderation: **Judit Geller**, Human Rights lawyer, PILnet, Global Network for Public Interest Law, Hungary*

This plenary explored the role of children and young people in climate litigation, focusing on the ECHR case led by Claudia Duarte Agostinho and Martim Duarte Agostinho following Portugal's wildfires<sup>1</sup>. **Claudia Duarte Agostinho** stressed empowering child and young advocates while addressing media challenges, while **Martim Duarte Agostinho** called for action to protect nature and communities. **Gerry Liston**, a climate lawyer with the [Global Legal Action Network](#), who assisted them, detailed their strategy to bring the case to the ECHR, seeking transnational solutions to climate change. Although the case was ultimately declared inadmissible due to legal challenges, including the principle of extra-territoriality and the requirement to exhaust national remedies, it focused on the need for consistent, Europe-wide legal standards to address climate issues.

**Helmut Sax**, representing Austrian lawyer Michaela Krömer, and Professor **Aoife Daly**, highlighted the need for stronger legal frameworks to protect children's rights and hold governments accountable. Additionally, they called for child-friendly legal systems to ensure children's voices are heard in climate policy discussions. The conversation expanded to broader legal and advocacy efforts led by Michaela Krömer and Aoife Daly. Helmut Sax discussed challenges in enforcing climate obligations, noting courts often view climate action as political. Aoife Daly emphasised treating children as equal stakeholders and the need for child-friendly legal systems. Both stressed the gap between legal commitments and practical protections for children's rights must be urgently addressed.

Finally, the panellists highlighted that the media plays a powerful yet delicate role in these actions, requiring careful management to protect young activists. Legal barriers, such as procedures before international courts, underscore the complexity of the necessary change. The panel agreed that children's right to a healthy environment must become a political and legal priority, backed by concrete actions.

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<sup>1</sup> [ECHR, Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Other States, 2024](#)

### Plenary 3 – Enabling Environments for Children to Claim Their Rights

**Els Dumortier**, Professor of Youth Criminology, Vrije Universiteit Belgium  
**Kata Dozsa**, Senior Associate Researcher and Adjunct Professor, Vrije Universiteit Belgium  
**Caroline Vrijens**, Flemish Children's Rights Commissioner, Chair of the European Network of Ombudspersons for children, Belgium  
**Ioana Mihailescu**, Young Climate Activist, Romania  
**Gábor Kiss**, Young Climate Activist, Hungary  
*Moderation: Sabrina Cajoly, International Human Rights Lawyer & Child Rights Expert, France*

This plenary brought together experts and young climate activists to discuss creating safer, more inclusive spaces for children to voice their concerns on climate. The discussion began with reflections on the increasing criminalisation of youth activism, including arrests of peaceful protesters, and the need for more supportive environments. **Ioana Mihailescu** and **Gábor Kiss** shared their experiences, with Ioana highlighting youth awareness efforts in Romania and Gábor Kiss pointing out the lack of climate focus in Hungary's education system. The panel emphasised how activism is often delegitimised, with children labelled as "activist terrorists." **Els Dumortier** stressed the importance of empowering youth through education and involving them in decision-making.

**Caroline Vrijens** highlighted legal barriers preventing children from claiming their rights, suggesting that Ombudspersons can help by advocating for children without formal legal processes. **Kata Dozsa** emphasised the importance of online activism and coalition-building, using Hungary as an example of cross-sector collaboration for systemic change. **Ioana Mihailescu** stressed the empowering effect of progress over victimisation, highlighting the need to create platforms for youth expression and remove participation barriers.

The panel called for greater child and youth involvement in decisions affecting their future, with **Ioana Mihailescu** stating, "They are telling us that we are the future, but they don't let us change anything".

## Day 2 - 11 October 2024

### Plenary 4 - Embracing Children's Diverse Profiles and Situations in Addressing Climate Justice

**Sophie Shields**, Policy & Impact Specialist, The Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland

**Astrid Podsiadlowski**, Project Manager on Rights of the Child, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

**Aysegul Sukran Öz**, Project Officer, Validity Foundation, Hungary

**Olivia Rope**, Director, Penal Reform International, Belgium

*Moderation:*

**Cédric Foussard**, Global Advisor on Justice with Children, Terre des hommes Foundation, Switzerland

**Angela Vigil**, Pro Bono Partner and Executive Director of Global Pro Bono, Baker & McKenzie LLP

This plenary explored how structural inequalities and systemic exclusion make children disproportionately vulnerable to climate change. Speakers highlighted that children, who make up nearly 30% of the global population, often have their voices marginalised in decision-making due to entrenched adult supremacy. Groups such as Roma children, children with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ children, and children in detention face compounded challenges, including inadequate access to resources, justice systems, and emergency preparedness. These marginalised communities are particularly vulnerable to climate crises like extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, and health risks.

The discussion emphasised the importance of adopting a human rights-based approach to climate justice, empowering children to become active participants rather than passive victims. Speakers called for innovative partnerships to amplify children and youth voices and dismantle entrenched paternalism. Examples included rethinking justice systems to make them more inclusive, ensuring evacuation and emergency plans address accessibility for children with disabilities, and supporting marginalised groups in accessing resources. Children in detention, in particular, were highlighted as an often-overlooked group whose safety and rights are neglected during climate crises.

Echoing the urgency for immediate action, the panel stressed the need for intergenerational collaboration and systemic reforms to ensure children's inclusion in climate justice advocacy. As **Olivia Rope** noted, children's perspectives must be at the heart of solutions, while **Sophie Shields** called for bold investments in research, partnerships, and youth empowerment. Overall, the session underscored that progress depends on collective action and prioritising children's voices in shaping a sustainable future.

## Closing plenary

The closing plenary brought together the young activists to reflect on the main takeaways from the seminar, highlighting the power of intergenerational collaboration in addressing climate justice. **Ioana Mihailescu**, the youngest activist present at 15, emphasised the capability of young people to drive meaningful change, urging adults to see children as activists rather than just children. Her message, “We can, and we will show you,” emphasised the determination of youth to take the lead in shaping a sustainable future. **Gabor Kiss** echoed this sentiment, stressing the importance of mutual learning between young people and experts, stating, “We need you, and you need us to act.”

**Oskar Bonte** shared an inspiring moment from the workshop session with the Belgian school students, where a young girl expressed relief at not feeling alone in the fight for climate justice. He called for unity, noting that collective action and connection define this historical moment.

The plenary concluded with a creative exercise, inviting participants to write their dreams on paper as actionable goals for the future. Quoting Martin Luther King, **Oskar Bonte** encouraged everyone to turn their dreams into reality, reminding the audience that meaningful progress lies not in the number of speeches but in the actions taken to build a better world.



## 4. Workshop summaries

### Day 1 – 10 October 2024

#### Workshop 1 - Mainstreaming children's rights through environmental law and legal practise

The workshop, led by **Kata Dozza**, researcher at VUB in the ENRICH project, welcomed a total of 27 participants, focused on integrating children's rights into environmental legislation and legal practices, with an emphasis on strategic litigation and access to justice. Participants attending the session strongly agreed through a poll and two practical cases studies that children should be able to enforce their environmental rights but noted the lack of procedural mechanisms to make this feasible. Discussions focused on the systemic challenges in prioritising children's rights, as they are often overlooked in legal projects and conversations, which typically exclude children's perspectives. There was a shared concern about the ethical and practical complexities of involving children in legal actions, with participants calling for careful consideration of their capacity, fears, and the potential impact on their well-being.

Frustration with State inaction on climate issues drove a call for rights-based approaches to link climate action with children's rights. Participants stressed the need for legislative reform to better integrate children's rights into environmental law, alongside greater professional awareness of the social and environmental impacts of climate change. While there was consensus on the importance of mainstreaming children's voices and rights, the burden of advocacy should not fall on children themselves but rather on systemic changes and proactive legal structures.

The session concluded by acknowledging the urgent need for innovative strategies and legal reforms to address the gap between children's rights and environmental justice, alongside a commitment to ethical considerations in involving children in legal processes.

#### Workshop 2 - Youth Climate Justice: Children and Youth as Rights Leaders in the Climate Crisis

The workshop on "Youth Climate Justice," (Y CJ) led by **Aoife Daly** and **Florencia Paz Landeira**, welcomed a total of 10 participants, focused on children and youth as leaders in climate activism, challenging the conventional adult-led framework of rights through the concept of "post-paternalism." It explored how through the Y CJ project tech-savvy young people are leading grassroots climate actions and community engagement, using social media and global networks to demand urgent change. The workshop emphasised how this generation's activism not only challenges adults' accountability but reframes the human rights approach to climate justice by placing young voices at the forefront.

In the first half of the workshop, discussions emphasised ethical tensions between protecting children from activism's burdens and empowering them to take meaningful action. While children are often deeply affected by climate crises, their participation is hindered by tokenism and

paternalism, limiting their ability to influence decisions. Models like the "Lundy model" were presented as solutions for genuine participation, calling for creating safe spaces where youth voices can shape policies and foster real change. Examples of youth-led advocacy, such as the contributions of young activists addressing Indigenous climate issues and other global crises, showcased the depth and sophistication of their involvement.

The second half of the workshop focused on Florencia Paz Landeira's study on youth climate justice, which explored diverse forms of youth-led climate action, from grassroots protests to governance participation. It focused on systemic barriers such as power imbalances, marginalisation, and inequitable participation models, calling for intersectional approaches that address race, gender, and socio-economic inequalities. The session concluded with a call to action for adults to support youth-led movements without undermining their agency, recognising the transformative role children and youth are playing in redefining rights, leadership, and climate governance.

### Workshop 3 - Beyond the Margins: Integrating Climate Change into Justice Responses for Children in Conflict with the Law

The workshop, led by **Donna McEwan** and **Fiona Dyer** from the Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice (CYCJ) at the University of Strathclyde, welcomed a total of 26 participants, explored the integration of climate justice into responses for children in conflict with the law. The speakers highlighted Scotland's progressive child justice system, rooted in children's rights. Three key milestones were emphasised: the 1971 introduction of the Children's Hearing System, focusing on the child's best interests; the 2011 Whole System Approach, promoting early intervention and alternatives to detention; and The Promise in 2020, which aims to "get it right for every child."

Discussions emphasised the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalised children, such as Roma children, homeless children, - bringing them to delinquency - and children in detention. Climate-induced displacement and resource scarcity can drive vulnerable children toward criminality or further disadvantage those already in conflict with the law. Additionally, justice systems must account for the physical risks to children in custody due to climate events, such as floods, wildfires, drought, etc. affecting detention facilities. The workshop emphasised that addressing these challenges requires understanding the interplay between climate and social justice, particularly for children. Restorative practices emerged as a promising intersection between climate action and child justice. Participants envisioned innovative ways to involve children in climate solutions, such as anti-wildfire initiatives and environmental education programmes.

However, there was a shared recognition that systemic issues—such as corporate inaction on climate change—should not place an undue burden on children to "fix" the crisis. A main takeaway was the importance of meaningful inclusion, ensuring children's views and opinions are heard and their participation goes beyond tokenism, reflecting their rights to equality, transparency, and responsibility.

The workshop concluded with reflections on how climate justice can be achieved through actionable steps. Ideas from children themselves included creating clean parks, promoting recycling, and transitioning to electric public transport.

#### Workshop 4 - Empowering Children and Young People through Children's Rights and Climate Education

The workshop, led by **Fanni Mátyók** of the youth-led organisation WellBee, welcomed a total of 16 participants, explored innovative approaches to empowering children through rights education and active participation. WellBee, founded during the COVID-19 pandemic, provides nature-based safe spaces where children can reconnect without the distractions of technology. The organisation's mission is to involve children in planning and managing their own activities, fostering empowerment and personal growth. **Fanni Mátyók** focused on the significance of peer-to-peer communication, with 19-year-old climate activist **Gábor Kiss** sharing his experience of learning and teaching about climate change and children's rights through WellBee programmes.

Key discussions focused on the challenges children face in claiming their rights and strategies to address them. WellBee's work with marginalised groups, such as Roma children and those affected by the war in Ukraine, highlighted the importance of fostering trust and inclusivity. Participants stressed the need for creative methods like art and drama, simplified communication, and genuine, participatory environments to avoid tokenism. The workshop underscored the value of trust, collaboration, and non-formal education in empowering children, with Gábor emphasising that authenticity builds openness and inspires action.

Through case studies, participants explored challenges like children advocating for safe play, organising protests, or seeking climate information. Discussions highlighted empowering children to act on their rights while balancing their needs. **Fanni Mátyók** emphasised adults' role in resolving conflicts between children's needs and rights, ensuring they can meaningfully participate in decisions shaping their lives.

## Day 2 – 11 October 2024

### Workshop 5 - Empowering Young Voices: Advancing Child Justice in the Climate Crisis

The workshop, led by **Giulia Patane, Angela Vigil, Judit Geller, Cédric Foussard, and Fiona Dyers**, welcomed a total of 26 participants, explored the critical role of children in climate justice, focusing on empowering young voices through systems and policies that prioritise their perspectives. Speakers highlighted innovative approaches to make children active participants in shaping solutions. A recurring theme was the call for adults to act as collaborators, stepping back to create inclusive projects that centre children’s participation.

Key discussions addressed ensuring children’s access to justice through child-friendly justice systems. Using case studies like *Malcolm’s Story*, participants illustrated how alienating legal proceedings can be for children. Proposed solutions included child advisory boards, role-playing exercises, and courtroom environments tailored to children’s needs, ensuring their voices are heard and respected in decision-making spaces. The vulnerabilities of children in detention facilities during climate crises were also examined, with calls for reforms like emergency plans, facility redesigns, and pro-bono legal support to address these risks and protect these children.

The workshop further emphasised non-court strategies to educate children on environmental laws and advocacy, such as apps and interactive tools translating complex policies into accessible formats. Additionally, participants highlighted the growing criminalisation of child and youth activism, stressing the need for legal support engaging law enforcement on the importance of climate protests, and creating non-hierarchical spaces for knowledge exchange between children and professionals. The workshop concluded with a call for justice systems and activism frameworks to shift towards collaboration, equipping children with tools and knowledge to lead in the fight for climate justice.

### Workshop 6 - Once upon a time... Environmental restorative justice through storytelling

The workshop facilitated by **Marianna Dimou and Olga Ziori**, welcomed a total of 19 participants, and explored the transformative power of storytelling, focusing on children and environmental justice. The workshop focused on storytelling—particularly folk tales—as a means to convey cultural values, foster community, and support emotional development. The session began with an interactive exercise around the word “Tale,” which revealed themes such as magic, fun, and imagination, setting the stage for discussions on sharing and the universality of storytelling. Folk tales were presented not just as entertainment, but as reflections of societal norms, cultural values, and universal emotions. Examples from African, Pakistani, and European traditions demonstrated how tales embody unique cultural perspectives. The speakers delved into the “epic laws” of folk narrative—such as repetition, symbolic numbers, and focused plots—underscoring how these patterns aid memorability and engagement, making folk tales timeless and culturally resonant.

The session explored storytelling as a tool for environmental and restorative justice for children. Folk tales often celebrate nature as a nurturing force, emphasising collective survival and interdependence, making them ideal for instilling values of care and respect. Participants

discussed the importance of empowering children to share their own stories, which builds confidence, fosters emotional healing, and validates their perspectives. Principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, inclusivity, and safeguarding were stressed as essential for creating a safe environment for storytelling. By offering children a platform to express themselves, storytelling nurtures empathy, encourages dialogue, and fosters a sense of agency—particularly in contexts such as restorative justice. Moreover, folk tales pass down essential life skills, from care and responsibility to respect for others and nature. The workshop concluded with a shared recognition of storytelling’s power as a tool for emotional well-being, cultural preservation, and climate justice, ensuring children’s voices are not only heard but valued within their communities and beyond.

### Workshop 7 - Children’s Rights to Access Justice in Climate Change Litigations

The workshop, led by **Clara Pastorino**, **Laura Carpaneto**, and **Francesca Maoli** from the University of Genoa, welcomed a total of 23 participants, delved into the challenges children face when seeking justice in climate change cases, particularly against states and corporations. Discussions centred on the procedural and material barriers preventing children from accessing justice. Key obstacles include children’s dependence on representatives, limited financial resources, and the complexity of climate litigation, which demands substantial scientific evidence and a high burden of proof. National and international legal systems present further hurdles, such as stringent admissibility requirements and distinctions between judicial and political action. While mechanisms like the ECHR and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child exist, landmark cases like *Sacchi* and *Duarte Agostinho* reveal how procedural barriers, such as the need to exhaust domestic remedies, often render children’s claims inadmissible. These challenges highlight the difficulty of ensuring children’s voices are heard in climate justice.

The workshop explored corporate accountability through strategic litigation, with a focus on cases like *Milieudefensie v Shell*<sup>2</sup>. This landmark ruling demonstrated the potential for holding multinational corporations accountable for breaching climate obligations, including extraterritorial impacts. However, such cases reveal significant disparities in legal frameworks across countries, limiting their replicability. The speakers discussed the European Union’s 2024 directive (CS3D)<sup>3</sup>, designed to enhance corporate accountability through due diligence and civil liability for environmental and human rights violations. Its effectiveness relies on consistent implementation across Member States, addressing gaps in international law, and leveraging scientific evidence to link harm to corporate actions.

The workshop concluded with the need to remove barriers to children’s participation in climate litigation through collaboration between legal experts, NGOs, and policymakers. It highlighted balancing punitive measures with frameworks for corporate responsibility, strengthening legal

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<sup>2</sup> <https://en.milieudefensie.nl/climate-case-shell>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1760/oj>

mechanisms, and amplifying children’s voices to align environmental and human rights agendas for future generations.

## Workshop 8 – Children & Young People Talk Climate Justice

The workshop, led by the Child Friendly Justice European Network, with the support of UNICEF Belgium, welcomed a total of 20 participants. It provided a valuable opportunity for 14 students of a class of NESPA, a Belgian secondary school from Genappes, to engage with the 6 young climate activists attending the seminar. It began by spotlighting the voices of activists from Belgium, Hungary, Portugal, and Romania, who shared their motivations, experiences, and the challenges they face in the fight for climate justice. From **Claudia and Martim Duarte Agostinho’s** first-hand experiences with devastating wildfires in Portugal to **Oskar Bronte’s** work addressing climate impacts on vulnerable communities in Colombia, the young activists highlighted the urgency of collective action. **Benjamin Van Bunderen Robberechts**, who sued Total Energies, and Claudia and Martim Duarte Agostinho, who pursued a case at the European Court of Human Rights, shared how their determined efforts—despite significant hurdles—offer hope and inspire others to act.

The activists spoke candidly about obstacles such as insufficient government support and the difficulty of balancing activism with education. However, they stressed the importance of mobilising communities, raising awareness, and amplifying youth voices to drive change. They underlined the pivotal role of children and young people in advancing progress, pointing to their impact on legal cases, climate conventions, and educational reforms. The session concluded with reflective exercises that encouraged the schoolchildren to consider their own roles in climate advocacy, leaving them inspired to take meaningful action.

The session highlighted the collective power of youth, showing how small actions drive systemic change. The children, inspired and motivated by the insights shared, voiced a sense of solidarity, remarking, “It’s nice to feel we’re not alone in this fight.” The session underscored the value of peer-led learning and highlighted how engaging children directly can nurture a sense of community and action.

## 5. Key takeaways and future directions

The 3rd Annual Seminar of the CFJ-EN underscored the urgency of addressing climate justice as a fundamental component of children’s rights. The event provided a dynamic platform for dialogue between young activists, policymakers, legal experts, and practitioners. Through diverse sessions, the seminar shed light on how structural inequalities, procedural barriers, and systemic exclusions impede children’s access to justice in the face of the climate crisis. The collective call for intergenerational collaboration and bold, innovative reforms reflects the growing recognition that children must not only be seen as stakeholders but as central actors in shaping a sustainable and just future.

### Key takeaways

Participants collectively emphasised the need to prioritise the voices of children and young people in all aspects of decision-making, particularly in climate action and justice. From empowering children and young climate activists through storytelling and education to addressing barriers in legal systems, the seminar demonstrated the importance of designing inclusive and accessible frameworks and safe environments for children. Specific recommendations included adopting child-friendly justice systems and complaint mechanisms, ensuring adequate support for marginalised groups of children, and leveraging partnerships with adults to close the knowledge and resource gaps that often exclude children from critical discussions and decisions.

### Future directions

Building on the insights from this seminar, CFJ-EN will focus on the following key messages and actions, detailed in a [separate policy brief](#):

- 1. Strengthening justice systems to support children and youth in the climate crisis:**
  - Expanding access of children to mechanisms that enable them to challenge environmental injustices and hold governments and corporations accountable;
  - Increasing resources to support children and youth and give them access to justice in the context of climate crisis.
- 2. Empowering children and youth in climate decision-making:**
  - Integrating children and youth’s participation into climate governance at all levels;
  - Adapting participation and communication methods to engage, inspire, and involve children and youth through peer-led interventions.
- 3. Protecting and safeguarding child and youth activists:**
  - Strengthening safeguarding and protection mechanisms for child and youth activists;
  - Facilitating open dialogue between children and society to amplify their voices.

#### 4. Addressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalised children:

- Developing inclusive evacuation plans tailored to marginalised children’s needs;
- Expanding social support programmes for vulnerable families in climate-affected areas, particularly targeting children at risk of displacement or exclusion.

#### 5. Holding States accountable for climate (in)action:

- Introducing robust accountability frameworks to monitor State compliance with environmental and human and children’s rights laws;
- Leveraging strategic litigation to drive systemic reforms and compel governments to act.

The seminar concludes with a sense of optimism and determination to act. As the youngest panellist **Ioana Mihailescu** declared, “We can, and we will show you.” These words resonate as a call to action for all stakeholders to champion the rights of children, not as a vision for tomorrow, but as a pressing reality for today. Together, through collaboration, innovation, and action, we can build a future where justice systems rise to meet the challenges of the climate crisis and protect the rights of every child.



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