

Young people on low incomes in the UK are more likely to be affected by the changing environment than their more affluent peers. Conversely, young people on low incomes also stand to benefit the most from more support and targeted policies as part of the green transition.

There is an abundance of evidence for how environmental crises will harm young people's physical and mental health, but there is also evidence that young people's education, development, and income will be hindered as well.

The most clearly evidenced impacts of our changing climate and air pollution on young people are:

- **Poor birth outcomes** – Including foetal strain, pre-mature birth, and lower birth weights.
- **Physical development** – Including poor development of lungs, brain, and future fertility.
- **Mental health** – Including environmental causes of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and [eco-compassion](#) (eco-anxiety).
- **Physical health and diseases** – Including increased risk of respiratory and cardiovascular issues, cancer, water-borne diseases such as gastroenteritis, and vector-borne diseases such as Lyme disease.
- **Education** – Including directly lowering academic performance as well as the wider disruption of missed school days.

Effective policies could help, but the evidence we reviewed found that not everyone will benefit equally:

- Young people from low-income households are more exposed to air pollution and toxic chemicals than their more affluent peers; more likely to live in poorly adapted housing; less likely to have access to green spaces and less likely to bounce back easily after extreme weather.
- Young people from ethnic minority groups and disabled young people are disproportionately represented in low-income households and will therefore be more affected.

These groups of young people have the most to gain from policies and programmes to improve housing, air quality, public transport, green spaces, and to address the financial implications of the transition to a post-carbon economy. Young women and girls could benefit particularly from improving access to STEM related education and training that leads to careers in green jobs.

This briefing also highlights worrying gaps in existing research and policy.

The climate and nature crises are human crises, yet this review suggests the British government isn't doing enough to assess and act on the impact of their policies on young people, particularly those already most marginalised. With a stronger focus on these impacts, the government has a much better chance of achieving their environmental goals and making sure all young people enjoy the benefits of a healthier environment.