

UNICEF SUBMISSION: Thematic Report on Climate Change and Internal Displacement

1. Human rights impacts of planned relocations

Millions of children are already being driven from their homes by weather-related events, exacerbated by climate change. Displacement – whether short-lived or protracted – can multiply climate-related risks for children and their families. In the aftermath of a disaster, children may become separated from their parents or caregivers, amplifying risks of exploitation, child trafficking, and abuse and hinder their right to education and health.

Planned relocations can be life-saving, but require considerable planning and financing to ensure that the rights of affected people are upheld, including those of children. It is particularly important to ensure children are protected, have access to child-critical services (education, child protection, social protection, health, water and sanitation and nutrition) and can participate in decisions that affect them. Further, any decisions on planned relocation must take the best interests of children as the primary consideration.

It is important to consider that children are not a uniform homogenous group. Some children, including girls, children with disabilities, and indigenous children, experience compounding vulnerabilities that can leave them increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Often with strong material and spiritual reliance on their lands, indigenous and pastoralist communities depend on the environment and its resources for their livelihoods. As we plan for relocation, care must be given to the unique needs of these children.

When well-managed, planned relocation can provide opportunities for children and young people to pursue aspirations, diversify their skills and contribute to their new [community](#). Green skilling pathways can promote access to green work opportunities, and foster access to self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in green sectors – critical for the fulfilment of young people’s rights. Some [examples](#) include:

- The "**Engaging Youth as Global Citizens in Vietnam**" program develops breadth of green skills from climate-smart agriculture to leadership, networking and global citizenship. It supports youth through scholarships for scientific research and seed funding. It has directly impacted 13,902 Vietnamese youth, funded 20 youth-led sustainable development projects, and supported 433 young farmers/researchers.
- **The Natural Wealth Programme in Colombia** collaborates with Indigenous communities and youth-led environmental groups to conserve biodiversity and ecosystems. It advocates for Indigenous and local environmental customs and supports youth initiatives in protecting the country’s natural resources and considering sustainable livelihoods in their local communities. It also collaborates with the Digital Cobosques Association to engage 192 youth in training sessions focusing on information technologies and content creation.

- **Learning Bridges in Jordan** - In collaboration with UNICEF, the Jordanian Ministry of Education launched Learning Bridges in 2020, a national blended learning program for Grades 4-9, integrating climate education and sustainable development into core curricula. The program adopts a project-based approach, actively integrating knowledge into students' daily lives, making it accessible for visually impaired students and those with reading difficulties. In its first year, the program reached nearly 500,000 students, with 65% being girls, in over 70% of public schools. It has also enabled 30,000 teachers to access online education on blended learning, with over 350,000 visitors accessing Learning Bridges activities online between March and May 2021.
- **Youth Agency Marketplace (YOMA)** in South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi and Peru. YOMA is a digital marketplace offering youth from under-resourced communities opportunities for social impact projects and learning, including job matching, mentoring, skills training, and work-based learning. Over 250,000 youth have benefited directly from future-based skills, particularly focused on mitigating climate change impacts.
- **The GrEEen (Boosting Green Employment and Enterprise)** program in Ghana promotes self-employment for youth, women, and migrants. It offers skill development, financial support, and cash-for-work initiatives, delivered with local and national governments. The program includes an annual GrEEen Innovation Challenge and provides short-term cash-for-work opportunities for climate-resilient infrastructure. As a result, 10 assemblies have transitioned to green economies, creating 1,500 sustainable jobs and enabling 3,500 individuals to develop self-employment. Additionally, 70,000 people have been integrated into Ghana's financial inclusion ecosystem.
- **i-UPSHIFT** is a three-month social innovation and entrepreneurship skills training program in Uganda for adolescents and youth aged 15–24, integrating UNICEF's UPSHIFT and ILO's business development curricula. It includes a four-day boot camp, mentorship sessions, and seed funding for innovative solutions, with a focus on climate change. Over 1,700 adolescents and youth, including vulnerable groups like refugees and girls, have been upskilled in 19 districts. Innovations include biogas from water hyacinth and a mobile app for plastics trading. With plans to expand, the initiative aims to upskill 50,000 adolescents and youth in NFE and formal education systems by 2025.

2. Legal, Policy and Institutional Frameworks

- Article XI of the [Kampala Convention](#) outlines obligations of States relating to sustainable return, local integration or relocation. Among other points, it articulates that States shall enable internally displaced persons to make a free and informed choice on whether to return, integrate locally, or relocate.
- Zambia's [protection guidelines](#) for vulnerable migrants provides procedures for effective identification, referral and service provision to such migrants, and specifically consider the best interests of unaccompanied and separated child migrants by taking a rights-based approach.

- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child contains an explicit request that obliges member States to “take all necessary measures to trace and re-unite children with parents or relatives where separation is caused by internal or external displacement arising from armed conflicts or natural disasters” ([Article 25](#), para. 2b).
- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)’s 2019 [Declaration](#) on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration reaffirmed that children do not lose their rights when they migrate. The Declaration has inspired a regional plan of action that acknowledges climate as a contributing factor to child migration in the region.

3. **Engagement of communities and regional and international actors**

While many of the planned relocation efforts surveyed have included some form of community engagement, there is little information available on whether these engagement mechanisms have included youth and [children](#). As planned relocation is generally intended as a permanent move for people at risk of climate-related hazards, it is particularly important to include children’s representatives in planning and decision-making about such moves, and that any decisions on planned relocation are taken with the best interests of children as the primary consideration.

Recently, UNICEF has established new partnerships with the Fiji Climate Change Division and the Fijian Taskforce on Relocation and Displacement, assisting the development of child-sensitive standard operating procedures for relocation of communities affected by climate change.

[Vanuatu’s](#) National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement is also an example of a policy that seeks to minimize negative impacts on the people affected, especially on vulnerable and minority groups, including children, women, the elderly and people with disabilities.

4. **Consideration of specific needs of relocated and affected populations**

Between 2016 and 2021 there were 43.1 million internal displacements of children linked to weather-related disasters – equivalent to approximately 20,000 child displacements per [day](#). In 2021, UNICEF reported that one billion children are at extremely high risk of the impacts of climate [change](#).

The jointly developed [Durable Solutions Checklist](#) for children provides guidance on integrating child-sensitive approaches into national durable solutions strategies and actions plans, including in the context of planned relocation. It outlines 11 key considerations, among which include key principles on access to uninterrupted learning, child participation, child-sensitive and resilient social protection systems and national systems, child-sensitive budgets and national development plans, and ensuring child-related data is accurate and represented in evidence.

When children migrate or become displaced, it is particularly important that their access to education be facilitated – even if they are in transit or living in a temporary [shelter](#). Displacement can disrupt children’s education pathways, and children who lose access to education may be subject to endure poor living conditions, forced into labor, or face increased challenges related to inclusion. In 2011, the Solomon Islands published a policy statement and guidelines aiming to ensure that students continue to have access to safe learning environments before, during and after emergencies, and that all schools identify temporary learning and teaching [space](#).

Schools in particular must adapt to student needs, and it is important that educational, health and social service staff are sensitized and trained to deal with physical and psychosocial needs resulting from the changes that provoked the [movement](#). This can include being sensitive to the loss of community and geographical landscape where the children may have grown up, as well as experiences en route.

Given that displacement affects minorities and indigenous groups disproportionately, many IDPs are unlikely to be able to speak the local language of instruction. Those switching to a new language of instruction need bridging programmes with qualified teachers, while those whose education has been interrupted require accelerated learning to help them to catch up. Displaced Quechua-speaking children in Peru, for example, were unable to understand or communicate with their Spanish-speaking teachers, resulting in higher levels of non-attendance and illiteracy, particularly among [girls](#).

Like education, health outcomes among internally displaced persons are not only an issue of access. Economic hardship and health-seeking behaviors can also play a role. Evidence suggests those displaced in urban settings are often forced to deprioritize health care in favor of income security to cope with [displacement](#). Displacement settings also often lack the services to address the special needs of children with disabilities, who may find themselves among the most marginalized.

During the twin cyclones of Judy and Kevin, hitting Vanuatu in March 2023, four assessed communities reported people with disabilities having issues accessing evacuations centers, 81% reported inaccessible toilets and 83% reported inaccessible bathing facilities. Assessments further showed that women and girls living with a disability were at greater risk of gender-based violence (GBV) due to their physical isolation, exclusion and [dependency](#).

In the East Asia and Pacific Region, 93% of UNICEF Country Offices considered disability in emergency preparedness plans, and 71% of plans were disability inclusive across multiple risks and sector responses. In Fiji, UNICEF partnered with the Pacific Disability Forum to survey 300 persons with disabilities about WASH accessibility and conducted 35 WASH accessibility audits in schools and public places designated as evacuation centers. 6 WASH facilities were improved to provide accessibility for persons with disabilities, particularly in evacuations.

Lastly, the evacuation of children as a group, without their parents, should only happen as a last resort. Children may face increased protection risks in temporary shelters, including risk of gender-based

violence and trafficking – particularly when they are not evacuated with their family [members](#). Operational guidance suggests that unaccompanied children who are evacuated should be placed into temporary interim care. Institutional or long-term adoption arrangements should be avoided as long as the situation remains [unsettled](#).

5. Data collection, analysis, and availability

Children on the move in the context of climate change are often statistically [invisible](#). Existing data on migrants, refugees and IDPs are usually derived from registers, censuses, administrative data and surveys. This data is often not disaggregated and does not include specific information on age, sex, origin or travel situation. Comparable, reliable, timely, disaggregated and accessible data are essential for better understanding and addressing the needs of children and young people on the [move](#).

The [Philippines](#) is one of the few countries to systematically collect disaster displacement data. The Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center collects data on the number of people evacuated and the number staying in shelters or with relatives over time and disaggregates this information by age, sex and location. A village early-warning system in the Philippines incorporates sound and visual signals to improve accessibility.

Lastly, it's important to consider displacement risk data alongside data on child poverty, conflict and fragility to identify the most vulnerable children. For example, Western Africa can expect a significant population increase and migration to urban centers, which are often located in coastal areas with a high risk of water related [displacement](#).

6. Recommendations

From UNICEF Climate Displacement [Report](#), Regional and CO inputs:

1. **PROTECT children and young people from the impacts of climate change and displacement by ensuring that child-critical services – including education, health, social protection and child protection services – are shock-responsive, portable and inclusive, and accessible, including for those already displaced.**

- Design services to be portable and able to follow children as they move. This means prioritizing portable skills and education certification, and online access to identity documents, health records and other information that enables children to reunite with family, maintain access to healthcare, continue to learn and stay connected with their communities.

- Set up services to be equitable and inclusive. Setting up systems and capacity for shock-responsive social protection, including cash transfer mechanisms to support children affected by climate shocks.
- Children who move in the context of climate change should be [integrated](#) into the educational system at the earliest opportunity and every effort should be made to remove barriers that may lead to their exclusion or discrimination. For example, gender-sensitive educational programmes are needed, as girls may face impediments to attending school because of their gender.
- Ensure access to national education systems for internally displaced children. This means all internally displaced children are accepted by all schools and alternative education programmes without discrimination in accordance with their rights as citizens or habitual residents. Displaced children should receive additional support when necessary, including language and catch-up classes.
- Children with disabilities should be supported through disability-inclusive and disability-targeted interventions during and after their move.

2. PREPARE children and young people to live in a climate-changed world by improving their adaptive capacity and resilience, enabling their participation, and promoting access to green skilling and learning-to-earning pathways.

- Equip children and young people in hotspot locations with the portable skills needed to build livelihoods elsewhere in a climate-changed world. This entails strengthening the ecosystem that supports children and young people to develop green skills and entrepreneurship in green sectors.
- Educate and empower children and young people to meaningfully engage in climate policy and action. Providing knowledge of climate change and resilience techniques through climate education is critical to enabling children and young people to effectively influence climate policies, budgets and plans.
- Include children’s representatives in planning and decision-making, so that any decisions on planned relocation are taken with the best interests of children as the primary consideration. More widely, it is important to ensure community engagement, including through interviews and data collection, and the involvement of affected communities in the relocation planning process.
- Explore innovative skills and training schemes for young people on the move, with a focus on upskilling for jobs of the future. Policymakers can leverage successful skilling programmes to create inclusive green skilling pathways for youth on the move and eliminate barriers hindering the participation of youth on the move.
 - Governments can build on existing programmes in their country that have established pathways and approaches for skilling youth, incorporating a breadth of green skills into the curricula and removing barriers that may prevent youth on the move from joining.

- Policymakers can promote access to green work opportunities for youth on the move by establishing clear learning-to-earning pathways from green skilling programmes to green jobs, as well as post-training support.

3. PRIORITIZE children and young people – including those already uprooted from their homes – in climate, humanitarian and development policy, action and investments.

- Recognize the connection between human mobility, displacement and climate change. Manage mobility options by expanding inclusive, fair and accessible migration pathways for children, families and young people living in hotspot locations. The option to move safely, voluntarily and with dignity from weather-related hotspots to cities or across borders can provide opportunities for young people to adapt to a changing climate as they pursue their aspirations and livelihoods. Planning for pre-emptive evacuations and relocations ahead of time with and for affected communities will also be critical. Include migrant and displaced children and young people, and their specific protection and assistance needs, in local, national, regional and international climate strategies, plans and policies. This includes National Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions, DRR strategies and wider frameworks for sustainable development.
- Prioritize child-sensitive DRR, community early-warning systems and anticipatory action to minimize risk in the new location. Engage local governments, affected communities, and children and young people in DRR and planning for displacement. A whole-of-society approach and partnering with local actors, communities and displaced children and young people – and those living in hotspot locations – is critical. At the policy level, national disaster risk reduction policies must consider measures to reduce the risks for relocation, and this needs to be included in the national adaptation plan.
- A specific relocation plan should include assessment of housing, infrastructure, livelihoods, and a specific plan for accessing services in the new location. Households that will be relocated will need economic and social support, and their legal and ethical rights must be addressed. From a climate perspective, it is important to ensure that the infrastructure prepared is resilient, the location well-selected based on the risk assessment conducted, and local commodities used.
- Strengthen data systems to plan for, track and monitor the weather-related displacement of children and leverage innovative technologies to help predict and simulate disasters. Where possible, data should be disaggregated by age, sex, location, ethnicity, household income and other key social and demographic variables to inform more targeted and effective investment and interventions by governments, humanitarian and development partners.

Key sources

1. [“Guiding Principles for Children on the Move in the Context of Climate Change”](#), UNICEF, IOM, Georgetown University and partners, 2022.
2. [“Children Displaced in a Changing Climate,”](#) UNICEF, 2023.
3. [“Equitable access to quality education for internally displaced children,”](#) UNICEF and IDMC, 2019.
4. [“Lost at home: the risks and challenges for internally displaced children and the urgent actions needed to protect them,”](#) UNICEF, 2020.
5. [“Children uprooted in a changing climate,”](#) UNICEF, IOM, 2021.
6. [“Skills for a Green Transition: Solution for Youth on the Move,”](#) UNICEF, World Bank, ILO, IFC, UNHCR, 2024.
7. Inputs from UNICEF HQ, Regional, and Country Offices