

Save the Children's submission in response to the [Call for Inputs: thematic priorities of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#) - June 2023

Save the Children would like to thank the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons for the opportunity to contribute to the Mandate's work. In line with Save the Children's areas of expertise, the below inputs focus on the topics of climate change and internal displacement, as well as sustainable integration or reintegration of internally displaced persons.

### Climate change and internal displacement

1. What issues related to internal displacement and climate change are most serious in terms of protecting human rights, reducing barriers, and fostering conditions for progressively achieving durable solutions that would warrant the Special Rapporteur's attention and reporting?

- **Lack of investment in forward planning and solutions undermines child rights:** Despite the wide recognition that the impacts of climate change are already driving displacement and will increasingly do so in the future, governments in affected countries or in countries most responsible for global emissions are not dedicating adequate attention to preventing forced displacement or providing opportunities for people to migrate in a safe and planned manner. Too often, displacement is treated as a short-term, humanitarian issue, with limited investment in long-term solutions. Not enough efforts are made to support people who choose to move to avoid severe impacts of climate change where they live, or who wish to stay where they live but require dedicated support for adaptation. Understanding climate change related displacement as a form of loss and damage and ensuring that people internally displaced by climate change, including children, are included in decision making on the management of loss and damage funds and their use, is important to ensure adequate resourcing for initiatives that aim to ensure that internally displaced families are able to obtain solutions and are protected from the multiple human rights concerns often linked to protracted displacement. In addition, it is imperative that governments proactively do everything in their power to prevent the negative impacts of climate change and displacement on child rights.
- **Trapped populations:** Climate change is rightly seen as a driver of displacement; however, climate risks can also increase poverty levels, making it harder for children and their families to cope with shocks, denying them the financial resources to move, and leaving them "trapped" in high climate risk locations. Based on Save the Children's research on the impacts of climate change on child displacement, some children in trapped communities were skipping meals; not attending school; engaging in child labour, child marriage or begging; or resorting to sex work.<sup>1</sup>
- **The impact of slow onset events must not be underestimated:** The impact of slow onset climate change is rarely captured in migration and displacement data, but it should not be under-estimated. For example, twice as many people were affected by slow-onset droughts than sudden storms in 2020<sup>2</sup>. Climate change-related slow onset events are likely to become an increasingly important factor in future displacements and is already playing a significant role in some contexts. Displacement triggered by slow onset events induced by climate change is also becoming increasingly a permanent reality for children.<sup>3</sup>
- **Initial displacement can trigger multiple displacements often resulting in cross-border migration:** When living conditions are no longer viable and competition in the labour market is too fierce, families are forced

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children (2021): Walking into the Eye of the Storm: How the climate crisis is driving child migration and displacement. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Eye-of-the-Storm.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) [International Disaster Database \(EM-DAT\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> Save the Children (2021): Walking into the Eye of the Storm: How the climate crisis is driving child migration and displacement. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Eye-of-the-Storm.pdf>

to move onwards, sometimes across borders, exposing them to further risk due to fewer rights, access to services and protection.<sup>4</sup>

- **Intergenerational tensions and lack of children’s agency:** In many contexts, decisions about moving as a result of a climate change induced events or in order to avoid them, are taken by community elders or heads of households, without sufficient consideration of the views and priorities of children and young people. The links between home and cultural identity can be so strong that older generations may choose, despite the possible danger, to stay in high risk locations – leaving children exposed to harmful events, or pushing them to move alone.<sup>5</sup> It is crucial to ensure that children’s rights are considered and their priorities heard in decision-making processes about potential movements.

## 2. What specific groups or populations are particularly or differentially affected by climate change and internal displacement? Is their meaningful and full participation ensured and if so, how? If not, what are the main obstacles?

- **Children.** Globally, an estimated 77 million children are living in poverty and exposed to climate threats such as flooding, severe drought, or recurrent cyclones.<sup>6</sup> As well as being on the frontline of the Climate Crisis, children are more sensitive to its impacts – more prone to malnutrition as a result of climate-induced food insecurity; to waterborne diseases as a result of water contamination; and more affected by the loss of schools and health care centres that comes with catastrophic cyclones and floods.
- **Children in urban areas.** Rural to urban migration is an important driver of urban growth and tends to be long-term.<sup>7</sup> Cities are key destinations for families who migrate to avoid climate risks<sup>8</sup>, particularly secondary cities. However, cities are already dealing with the effects of climate change, and displaced populations often end up in unsafe areas, slums and informal settlements, where they are not able to enjoy many of their fundamental rights. Informal settlements are growing rapidly, and lack of infrastructure and services poses risks to their inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> As a result, people displaced by climate change are often subject to poor living conditions and have considerably limited access to local job opportunities. Furthermore, informal settlements are often just as at-risk from climate change, located on marginal land making them especially vulnerable to hurricanes, floods, fires and other climate related disasters.<sup>10</sup>
- Children are rarely consulted on policies and initiatives that impact them. Children are perceived to lack competence, knowledge and judgement. Involving them in decisions is thought to place too heavy a burden on them, and many think that giving children a voice will lead to excessive demands or participation exposing them to risk of harm.<sup>11</sup> However, time and again, experience shows that children – even very young children – demonstrate not only that they have views, experiences and perspectives to express, but that their expression can contribute positively to decisions that affect the realisation of their rights and

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, UNDP, UN-Habitat, and IOM. “Overview of Internal Migration in Lao PDR.” Policy Brief. Bangkok: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Human Settlement Programme, and International Organization for Migration. <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/policy-briefs-internal-migration-southeast-asia>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Eye-of-the-Storm.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Save the Children (2022) [Generation Hope](#)

<sup>7</sup> ADB 2016. Urban Development in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Edited by Florian Steinberg and Januar Hakim. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/185008/urban-development-gms.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Save the Children (2021): Walking into the Eye of the Storm: How the climate crisis is driving child migration and displacement. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Eye-of-the-Storm.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Mixed Migration Centre (2022) Climate change, environmental stressors, and mixed migration. Available at: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/>

<sup>10</sup> Mixed Migration Centre (2022) Climate change, environmental stressors, and mixed migration. Available at: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Save the Children (2011) Every Child’s Right to be Heard

wellbeing.<sup>12</sup> The participation of children in climate change conversations is often limited – and even more so when they are displaced, as displacement often intersects with other factors that expose children to inequality and discrimination, such as being a representative of a minority ethnicity, religion, language. Many children feel that they are being ignored.<sup>13</sup> Children should be supported to conduct their own climate campaigning, advocacy and strategic litigation to influence change on issues important to them. This can be supported by training, providing access to child-friendly information, and facilitating access to decision-making platforms (incl. future COPs).<sup>14</sup>

3. What actions would you suggest the Special Rapporteur take to address these issues, within the purview of her mandate and complementary to the actions of her predecessors?

- Working with States and other actors to ensure a solutions-oriented approach to internal displacement, guided by child rights and broader human rights considerations.
- Working with States to create policies that ensure that no one is forced to stay trapped in conditions that do not support the realisation of their rights, and that those who decide to move can do so safely, in a planned and supported manner.
- Support States to invest in and support integration and social cohesion including by investing in inclusive urban planning in situations where people are moving from rural to urban areas; removing all legal and administrative barriers for families to integrate in their new environments and access key services including healthcare, education and social protection systems.
- Advocate for internally displaced people and communities to be able to benefit from loss and damage funds to support their access to solutions. Their perspectives must be heard in decision-making about any mechanisms to be set up for the use of such funds.
- From the perspective of her thematic expertise and understanding of the impacts of climate change on displacement patterns inside affected countries, support the efforts to create a strong international framework focused on cross-border displacement in the context of climate change. This is a current significant gap<sup>15</sup> that requires dedicated efforts and support from all actors with relevant technical competence. This would require working closely with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change.

4. What are the main elements of effective preventive strategies for internal displacement driven by climate change, including adaptation measures and planned relocation policies?

- **Evidence-driven solutions:** it is essential to generate more gender, age and diversity disaggregated data on the realities of people, including children, at risk of or having been displaced by climate change, as well as their priorities for solutions in order to inform programme and policy interventions.
- **Scaling up urban programming and investing in urban planning** with an inclusive focus on providing sustainable solutions to displaced children and families.
- **Ensuring inclusivity:** it is crucial to ensure strategies are carried out with an understanding of different experiences and access to rights that children may have based on ethnicity, ability, religion, SOGIESC and other characteristics.
- **Coherence** between climate change, displacement, migration, humanitarian, and development frameworks to enable solutions and advance-planning.

<sup>12</sup> Save the Children (2011) Every Child's Right to be Heard

<sup>13</sup> Save the Children (2022) [Generation Hope](#)

<sup>14</sup> Save the Children Generation Hope Campaign

<sup>15</sup> See for example the report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5334-providing-legal-options-protect-human-rights-persons-displaced>

## Sustainable integration and/or reintegration into the communities in which they settle or return to

19. What issues related to integration or reintegration of internally displaced persons are most serious in terms of protecting human rights, reducing barriers and fostering conditions for progressively achieving durable solutions that would warrant the Special Rapporteur's attention and reporting?

- **Limited focus on rights and accountability:** Save the Children welcomes the recent momentum on solutions to internal displacement. Governments have to take the lead on providing solutions, and the engagement of the development actors is much needed to advance solutions. It is important, however, to ensure a due focus on the protection of human rights and accountability between the government authorities and internally displaced persons – often severed during displacement. This is particularly key in the process of integration or reintegration – at a point when internally displaced persons are considered to be 'on a pathway to solutions.' The role of local civil society is central in these processes, and more work should be done on exploring successful ways of removing barriers for IDPs' civil participation in situations of internal displacement.
- **Lack of meaningful participation of IDPs, including children:** Meaningful participation of internally displaced people in planning and management of solutions is a core principle of both the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced People and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Children's participation is also enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, in practice, consultations with internally displaced persons are often tokenistic, and focused on (male) heads of households or community elders. Children, representing over 40% of the world's IDPs, continue to be treated as a group with special needs or vulnerabilities, rather than rights holders whose perspectives are essential to solutions planning. Due to this, children's rights risk being overlooked in reintegration or integration processes. Save the Children has observed this first hand in particular in one context, where some initiatives to support the integration of internally displaced people in host community have been shaped based on consultations with community elders, and as a result overlooked the needs of IDP children, especially girls, exposing them to risks of early marriage, education drop-out and discrimination.

20. What specific groups or populations among internally displaced persons face particular challenges in integrating or reintegrating, and what are these challenges? Which challenges are faced by host communities and how to address them?

- **Children, in particular adolescents,** are often facing specific challenges in integration and reintegration. With much of solutions analysis and monitoring focusing on adults, the priorities of children are not systematically captured and consequently not reflected in planning and implementation of reintegration or integration support. Save the Children's research with Syrian internally displaced and refugee adolescents<sup>16</sup> has highlighted the specific and distinct challenges that adolescents face when trying to integrate in contexts they have been displaced to.
- Based on Save the Children's operational knowledge, **internally displaced girls** are often facing specific challenges due to the double barrier they face to participate and voice their concerns due to their age and their gender. The example from one country where Save the Children operates is a case in point: integration planning did not consider the limited capacity of schools to accommodate IDPs and the access of girls to latrines in schools, now affecting their ability to attend education. Another risk observed linked to integration is the willingness of IDP families to create ties to local communities for protection and sharing of resources through marriage, including marrying off adolescent girls to host community families.

<sup>16</sup> Save the Children (2021): Anywhere but Syria. <https://www.savethechildren.net/anywhere-syria>

21. What factors enable or impede the sustainability of integration or reintegration of internally displaced persons? Please refer to social cohesion, mental and psychological health, identity, cultural and spiritual factors.

- Based on Save the Children’s research with displaced Syrians,<sup>17</sup> displacement has significant and long-lasting impacts on children’s identity development, sense of self and perceptions about their surrounding environment. These can either negatively or positively impact integration or reintegration, depending on children’s ability to interact with their non-displaced peers and community around them. To support a sense of *psychosocial safety* for internally displaced children in Syria, Save the Children has identified eight key building blocks (see figure 1).<sup>18</sup>
- Whether children and their families share a sense of common aspirations for the future seems to be important for a child’s ability to positively experience integration or reintegration: children hope that their integration or reintegration priorities and concerns are understood by their caregivers. In this regard, supporting parenting during the integration or reintegration process, with a specific understanding of the challenges related to displacement and (re)integration, can enable success. Save the Children has developed specific programming approaches to support families in the context of migration and displacement to provide a positive environment for their children.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 1. How to build psychosocial safety for displaced children

22. What actions would you suggest that the Special Rapporteur take to address these issues within the purview of her mandate and complementary to the actions of her predecessors?

- Ensure that an age, gender and diversity perspective is adopted as a central component of all durable solutions processes, including meaningful participation of children in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding initiatives. The interagency Checklist for Child-Sensitive National and Local Durable Solutions Strategies to Address Internal Displacement, developed by Plan, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision,<sup>20</sup> is a reference document that States and other actors can use to guide their thinking and action planning.
- Advocate for States and local authorities to actively establish and maintain mechanisms for internally displaced children to voice their concerns and priorities to decision-makers at different levels.
- Advocate for all integration and reintegration initiatives to be based on human rights, including child rights, and establishing effective accountability mechanisms of both humanitarian actors and duty bearers.

<sup>17</sup> Save the Children (2021): Anywhere but Syria. <https://www.savethechildren.net/anywhere-syria>

<sup>18</sup> Save the Children (2019): Psychosocial Safety: Pathways to psychosocial safety for Syria’s displaced children and adolescents. [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/pss\\_safety\\_brief.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/pss_safety_brief.pdf/)

<sup>19</sup> Save the Children (2023): Safe Families Common Approach Elevator Pitch. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/safe-families-common-approach-elevator-pitch-2/>

<sup>20</sup> Plan, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision (2023): Durable Solutions for Children: Checklist for child-sensitive national and local durable solutions strategies to address internal displacement. [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Durable-solutions-checklist\\_final.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Durable-solutions-checklist_final.pdf/)

- Monitor State progress in supporting age, gender and diversity responsive solutions and elevate good practice, including on ensuring a meaningful participation of children in planning, implementing and monitoring of integration and reintegration initiatives.

