

**FOR  
EVERY  
CHILD IN  
DANGER**

**unicef**   
UNITED KINGDOM



# **NO PLACE TO CALL HOME**

**PROTECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS WHEN THE  
CHANGING CLIMATE FORCES THEM TO FLEE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**Around the world, record numbers of children are on the move – 1 in 45 children have been uprooted from their homes, and are moving across borders or within their own countries in precarious circumstances. The devastating effects of climate change on communities are already contributing significantly to these staggering numbers, and are set to play an increasing role.**

In 2015, almost 15 million people were displaced within their own countries as a result of weather-related disasters such as flooding and typhoons. The annual average since 2008 is higher still, at 21.5 million – equivalent to almost 2,500 people being displaced every day. Climate change is already influencing the frequency and intensity of these disasters.

Yet even these figures do not capture the silent plight of children driven to migrate by gradual onset crises such as drought and salinisation, or living in situations of protracted displacement. Their numbers are likely to be many times higher.

As in every crisis, **children are the most vulnerable**: to the impacts of climate change that force them from their homes in the first place; as part of the moving process itself; whether they travel with their family or alone; and when they arrive at their destination, in hostile environments that may be exposed to further climate risks. The poorest and most disadvantaged children are likely to suffer most. From heightened threats to their health, education, safety and freedom from violence, exploitation or abuse, as well as their right to an identity and sense of place, this study examines the manifold impacts of climate-linked migration and displacement on children's rights as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It finds that despite their acute vulnerability, **children remain virtually invisible** in emerging research and policies around climate-related displacement and migration. Children and families moving across borders in particular face a serious protection gap under existing international law and instruments, while

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*A girl wades through flood water in Kiribati*





*Drought threatens food security and can force families to migrate*

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national responses to this challenge remain weak and fragmented. As the impacts of climate change escalate, these gaps, compounded by a lack of child-focused research and data that can reveal their distinct experiences and views, will continue to have disastrous real-world consequences for children.

### CHILD-CENTRED SOLUTIONS

In the absence of an international legal framework that grants legal status and protection to these vulnerable people – and recognising that many children will be displaced or migrate internally – it is vital that States **place children’s rights at the heart of international and national climate, humanitarian, disaster risk reduction, development, and migration strategies** in order to prevent and minimise children’s displacement, enhance children’s resilience, and facilitate safe and legal migration routes.

The Paris Agreement represents an important step forward, acknowledging that children’s rights and intergenerational equity, as well as the rights of migrants, should be considered in the context of action to address climate change, and establishing new processes to examine migration and displacement resulting from climate-related impacts. This, combined with other key international frameworks, offers an important opportunity to progress child-centred solutions to this immense challenge, but these commitments and pledges must be urgently translated into action on the ground.

At a fundamental level, limiting global temperature rises to 1.5°C or lower above pre-

industrial levels will be a prerequisite to our ability to manage the risks of climate-related displacement and migration to children. In parallel, social services, including for health, education and child protection, will need to be strengthened and routinely informed by a child-sensitive analysis of disaster and climate risk in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change on children more effectively.

As one of the largest groups affected, and one of the most vulnerable, children’s right to participate in decision-making on this issue must be upheld. Investment in climate change and disaster risk reduction education will be essential for equipping children with the knowledge and skills that they require to exercise their voice in these decisions, to protect themselves, and to take advantage of new opportunities that may emerge when they move. Indeed, governments have yet to embrace the vital role that migration can play in improving the circumstances of families and children in the face of deteriorating conditions, in addition to the positive contribution that they make at their destination. Recognising these benefits, and putting in place the measures required to

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facilitate safe migration through legal channels, will be an essential step towards protecting children and increasing their access to vital resources and services.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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Right now, children are in danger as the impacts of climate change present increasing threats to their lives, forcing them to flee their homes and undertake perilous journeys – often to hostile and unsafe destinations where their rights face further violations. Urgent measures are required to keep them safe, protect their rights and provide them with durable solutions.

## ACTION ON THE GROUND

### Take urgent action to tackle climate change

Addressing climate change as a root cause of large scale movement is the most essential action that countries can take to protect the rights of children at risk of being displaced by its impacts. Respecting and promoting children's rights in climate change action, as called for by the Paris Agreement and the Committee on the Rights of the Child will entail action to limit warming to 1.5°C or lower above pre-industrial levels and a rapid and rights-based transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy for communities. In parallel, significant investment is required in resilient health care facilities, schools, and water and sanitation systems, informed by a child-sensitive analysis of disaster and climate risk.

### Increase children's participation in decision-making on climate-related displacement and migration.

Children should be provided with formal mechanisms to participate in decision-making at the international, national and community levels, including displaced and migrant children themselves – as well as those in 'receiving' communities – in order to enable policies and programmes to be designed and adapted with children in mind. Children should receive age- and gender-appropriate and context-specific information on risks, opportunities and their rights, alongside education on disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and measures to strengthen their resilience. Investing in education will also be essential to equip children with the skills required to diversify their opportunities and prospects, and to benefit in the context of climate-related displacement and migration.

### Ensure that development projects incorporate robust human rights safeguards.

Climate mitigation and adaptation projects must be informed by respect for human and child rights, including provisions for access to information, consultation and effective remedy for harm. Relocation should not occur without the full and informed consent of communities, and children should be active participants in these decisions. Child and human rights should be central to the design of the new UNFCCC Sustainable Development Mechanism in order to minimise displacement and to ensure that implementing States and other actors adhere to human rights.

## POLICY

### Incorporate and address the nexus between children's rights, climate change, displacement and migration in international and national-level policies. Specifically, governments should:

#### *International*

- Incorporate children's rights in the new five year rolling work plan of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism, including with regard to its workstream on migration, displacement and human mobility, in order to acknowledge and address child-specific impacts and needs.
- Ensure that children's voices are heard through their meaningful participation in the work of the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement in order for its recommendations to reflect their concerns, perspectives and ideas. In addition, seek collaboration and input from human and child rights bodies and experts.
- Embed child rights in the work of the Platform for Disaster Displacement, and ensure that climate change and its impacts on the movement of children are addressed in the Global Compact on Migration.

#### *National*

- Incorporate child rights and climate-related displacement and migration in national



climate and disaster risk reduction strategies and processes (e.g. Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and national and local Disaster Risk Reduction strategies), SDG implementation plans and migration strategies, and foster coherence between these in order to prevent and minimise displacement, enhance resilience, and facilitate safe and legal routes.

- Incorporate reporting on how climate-related displacement and migration and response measures affect children and other vulnerable populations in national monitoring and review processes under the UNFCCC, SDG and Sendai Frameworks, as well as in periodic reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other human rights monitoring mechanisms.
- Take procedural and institutional steps to increase internal capacity, awareness and collaboration among different communities of practice, such as those envisaged by government signatories of the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action.

#### *Cross-cutting*

- Pay particular attention to the magnified risks faced by children experiencing multiple forms of discrimination owing to poverty, gender, ability, ethnicity, religion, legal status or other factors, in order to ensure that measures reach the most vulnerable children.

*Two young asylum seekers study a world map*



- Recognise the positive role that migration can play as a form of climate change adaptation, particularly in providing youth with opportunities to diversify skills and harness economic opportunities, and in enabling them to make a positive contribution at their destination.
- Developed countries should provide technical assistance to developing countries to establish child-centred and rights-based strategies, policies and best practice local solutions.

#### **RESEARCH**

##### **Generate new evidence through policy-oriented research, applying a child-rights lens**

New child-centred research methods must be employed to capture the distinct impacts of various forms of climate-related mobility on children and its implications for their rights, including through focus groups and interviews with children, and by applying a child rights lens to existing terminology in the field. Filling critical gaps in the knowledge base will require further analysis and policy-oriented research concerning variables such as the relative impacts of migration on children when they migrate with family or alone, or when they are left behind by one or both parents, and whether the benefits of migration as an adaptation strategy provides for the best interests of the child.

##### **Enhance efforts to collect disaggregated data**

Substantial efforts are required to collect more consistent and credible qualitative and quantitative data relating to children and families that are on the move due to the impacts of climate change, including the nature of climate-related harm and its interaction with other drivers, where they live, the risks they face, and the contribution they make at their destination. Where possible, data should be disaggregated by age, sex, location, ethnicity, household income and other key social and demographic variables. This can inform more targeted and effective investment and interventions by governments. Establishing specific child-focused indicators within climate, DRR, development, humanitarian and migration-related projects and programmes could help to facilitate this.

We live in a dangerous world where millions of children are suffering and dying unnecessarily.

Climate change wreaks havoc on children's lives. They are the hardest hit by climate-related disasters, each and every time.

Unicef is protecting children in danger. We help them adapt to their changing climate. We help them to be prepared when disaster strikes. And we empower them to speak out and to build a sustainable future.

Right now, millions of children are in danger. We'll do whatever it takes, until every child is safe.

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Registered Office  
30a Great Sutton Street  
London EC1V 0DU

Registered Charity No.  
1072612 (England and Wales)  
SC043677 (Scotland)

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