

**FOR
EVERY
CHILD IN
DANGER**

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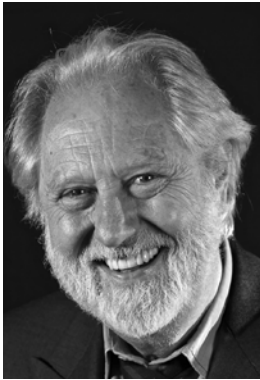


NO PLACE TO CALL HOME

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

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**Lord David Puttnam,
Unicef UK Ambassador**

Climate change is rewriting the future for our children, and our children's children. And the nature of this change is irrefutable. Indeed, it is already fundamentally affecting the lives of millions of children: their

safety when extreme weather strikes and their homes are destroyed; their health, and even their survival when water dries up and crops are laid to waste.

Needless to say, it's the most vulnerable children that are the hardest hit; the ones with precious little to begin with.

Little wonder the adverse impacts of climate change are also reshaping the movement of people around the globe. According to Unicef, almost 50 million children have already been forced from their homes, migrating across borders or displaced within their own countries, and climate-related events are contributing significantly to these numbers. On average, 21.5 million people are displaced by weather-related disasters each year, equivalent to almost 2,500 people every single day.

The numbers of children driven to migrate by gradual crises such as desertification or coastal erosion and unable to return home is likely to be many times higher, but their desperate situation is not captured in global data.

As this important report sets out, children face new and enormous dangers when they are forced to move by the impacts of climate change – whether they are moving with families or alone, or simply left behind when their parents move away. Yet despite the disproportionate threats they face to their safety and most basic human rights, children are too often the silent victims of these processes. Their specific needs and vulnerabilities are rarely considered by governments that all too often are focused on controlling and constraining movement, to the exclusion of children's rights.

This must change. We must place children at the heart of integrated actions on development, migration and climate change – to keep children who find themselves on the move, or affected by migration, safe from harm, and to address climate change as a powerful root cause of their displacement in the first place. Indeed, we need to go even further, and ensure that children are the active beneficiaries when climate-related movement occurs, from better access to education, to improved health services and wider opportunities.

We have a strong international framework in place to address these challenges for children: the historic Paris Agreement on climate change, adopted by the international community in December 2015, commits governments to halt global temperature increases to 'well below' 2°C, and to pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C. It acknowledges that children's rights and intergenerational equity, as well as the rights of migrants, should guide government action to address climate change. This, along with other key international frameworks, provides us with the valuable policy tools required to change things.

Yet these commitments will not be worth the paper they are written on unless they are urgently translated into action, and enable us to cut through the politics of both climate and migration in ways that will genuinely address the rights and needs of children.

We have the capacity to tackle climate change, to minimise displacement, to enhance children's resilience, and to facilitate safe and legal migration routes that do not expose children to unnecessary risks. What's now needed is the courage and creativity not only to meet our existing obligations, but to exceed them.

The analysis and recommendations contained in this report provide an important and incredibly timely contribution to these efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, approximately 1 in 45 children are on the move – nearly 50 million boys and girls that have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced within their own countries.¹ Climate-related events and their impacts are already contributing significantly to these staggering numbers, with 14.7 million people facing new internal displacement as a result of weather-related disasters in 2015 alone. The annual average since 2008 is higher still, at 21.5 million, equivalent to almost 2,500 people being displaced every single day.²

Yet for every family forced from their home in the wake of extreme weather events, many more are being driven to migrate by gradual onset crises. Rising sea levels, changing rainfall patterns, salinisation, drought, and glacial melt are just some of the changes that are already placing huge pressure on children and their communities – fuelling and compounding poverty, insecurity, and even conflict. This trend is firmly on an upward trajectory, with estimates

of the total numbers of climate-related migrants by the middle of the century ranging from 200 million³ to over one billion.⁴

As in all crises, children are the most vulnerable. Their physical, psychological and emotional immaturity and their reliance on adults for security means that they are exposed to a variety of unique and heightened risks – both from the initial climate-related harm that leads to displacement, and as part of the process of moving itself. Displaced children and their families lose much more than shelter when forced out of an area. They lose access to health care, education, livelihoods, social services and networks, religious services, political autonomy, and the security and identity associated with a sense of home.⁵ Children that become separated from their parents and other family members are more likely to experience violence, exploitation or abuse. Long-term implications of psychological and physical childhood trauma can extend to impacts on their health, education and economic well-being over their lifetime.⁶



A man carries a young girl through flood waters in Punjab Province, Pakistan

© Unicef/Zaidi

Children and young people are also among the most likely to be sent away to seek work elsewhere when climate-related events, such as intensifying drought, place untenable pressure on households. Aside from the risks they face *en route*, the destinations for many of these migrants may themselves be highly exposed to climate-related risks, such as unplanned and informal settlements in large coastal cities. On the other hand, when properly managed, the opportunities and benefits of migration can represent a lifeline for families and children seeking to improve their circumstances in the face of deteriorating conditions, offering increased access to goods and services, and a future that would not have been possible otherwise.

The exact causal relationship between climate change, displacement and migration is hard to quantify due to the complex interaction of climate change with other social, economic, political and cultural drivers. What is clear however is that the adverse effects of climate change are already playing a role and are likely to do so increasingly in future. Yet current national and international responses to climate-related displacement and migration remain weak and fragmented, and those moving across borders in particular face a serious protection gap under existing international law and instruments. As the impacts of climate change escalate, this gap will continue to have real-world consequences for children.

Despite the enormous risks they face, children have been largely overlooked in the emerging discourse, research and policy-making on climate-related migration and displacement. This report seeks to begin addressing this omission by presenting some of the ways in which children are acutely affected, and exploring why their rights – as set down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, or the Convention) – must be at the heart of addressing this challenge.

While seeking to shine a light on this under-examined area, it is important to underline that all children, without exception and regardless of the reasons they move, are entitled to protection. Although our understanding of the complex interaction between climate change, rising inequality, natural hazards, violence and conflict as the source of large-scale movement is becoming more sophisticated, this is not yet adequately reflected in policy and legal responses, which tend to focus on single, isolated drivers. This is mirrored in – and further replicated by – the work of organisations and actors seeking to address these issues. Ultimately, keeping children safe and providing them with durable solutions in the context of multifaceted and mounting challenges will require our approach to become much more nuanced, holistic, integrated and – above all – to be strongly underpinned by children’s rights.

THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IS THE MOST RAPIDLY AND WIDELY RATIFIED INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY IN HISTORY, COUNTING 196 STATE PARTIES. THE CONVENTION SETS DOWN THE DISTINCT SET OF RIGHTS THAT APPLY TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER THE AGE OF 18, IN ADDITION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROVIDED FOR IN OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES, WHICH APPLY TO BOTH ADULTS AND CHILDREN.



CLIMATE-RELATED MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

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The potential of climate change to trigger migration has been recognised for a quarter of a century - in 1990, the First Assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that “the gravest effects of climate change may be those on human migration”.⁷ This was restated more recently in the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment, which recognised that “climate change over the 21st century is projected to increase displacement of people”.⁸ Environmental migrants are defined by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as:

“persons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”⁹

Despite having contributed minimally to the causes of climate change, it is predominantly countries in the global south that are most

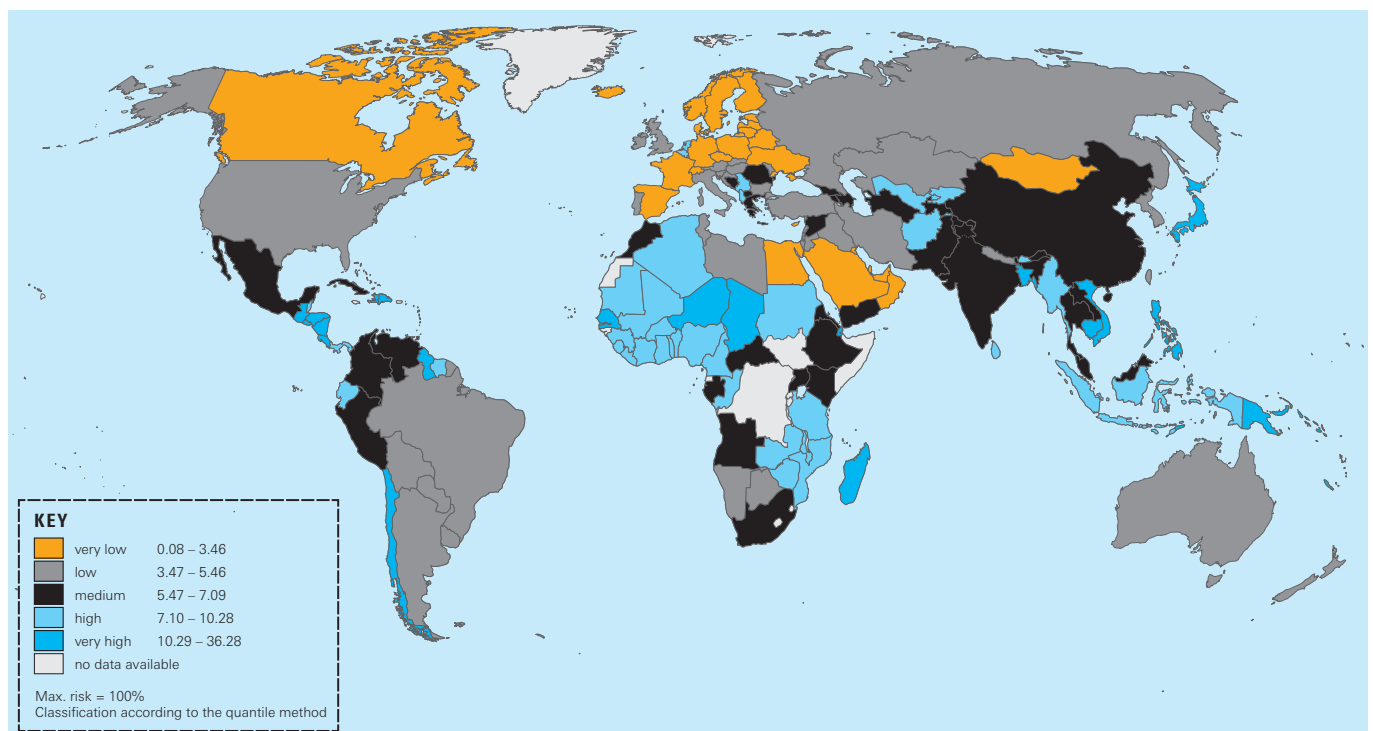
highly exposed to its impacts due to their location in tropical regions where environmental changes will be most severe, with larger increases in mean temperature and bigger impacts on rainfall patterns relative to other regions.¹⁰

Populations in these countries are also more vulnerable due to poverty; dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods; poor housing, healthcare, education and infrastructure; and limited financial, technical and institutional capacity to prepare, recover and adapt.¹¹ Children tend to make up a larger proportion of these societies, accounting for 47 per cent of the population in least developed countries.¹²

Whether through intensification of extreme weather, increased warming and drought, sea-level rise, changing rainfall patterns, or other adverse effects resulting from the complex interaction of climate change with other drivers, it is clear that the impacts of climate change are already significantly affecting displacement and migration flows, and are likely to do so increasingly in future.¹³ The most disadvantaged and marginalised children in particular are more likely to suffer the worst impacts, due to their

FIGURE 1: AREAS MOST AT RISK OF CLIMATE-RELATED IMPACTS (WORLD RISK INDEX, 2016)

Worldwide hotspots for disaster risk are predominantly in the global south



reduced access to essential services and lower capacity and resources to cope or to seek safer and more sustainable futures elsewhere.

The predominant ways in which the impacts of climate change are understood to drive human mobility are commonly defined by how the decision to move is made. However,

many of the concepts and definitions used within policy processes and academia alike are not necessarily applicable to the distinct experiences of children (see Table 1).

CLIMATE-RELATED MOBILITY: CAVEATS ON TERMINOLOGY FROM A CHILD RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Terminology	Caveats for understanding children & climate-related mobility
<p>Displacement occurs when a person is forced to move due to a hazard event occurring, or the threat of such an event occurring (evacuation). Displacement tends to be sudden, short distance and temporary in nature,¹⁴ and easier to attribute to a particular disaster event. While good data exists on new internal displacements due to disaster events each year, there are no global figures for the total number of people living in protracted displacement due to disasters,¹⁵ or regarding those that move across national borders.</p>	<p>Children are among the most vulnerable groups, and make up a large proportion of the world's poor. They face multiple heightened risks in the context of displacement and migration, including those associated with family separation, exposure to exploitation, violence and abuse, loss of education, increased vulnerability to psychological trauma and physical harm, and their right to an identity.</p>
<p>Migration refers to movement which is voluntary to some degree. In reality, the distinction between forced displacement and voluntary migration is blurred,¹⁶ particularly when the decision to move occurs in the face of recurrent disasters, or the gradual impacts of slow-onset events such as desertification or sea-level rise which lead to a significant deterioration in living standards. Voluntary migrants are more likely to make a decision to move, for example in order to seek opportunities and gain income elsewhere. For this reason, voluntary migration is increasingly recognised as an important adaptation and risk reduction strategy, helping to reduce exposure, decrease pressure on natural resources, and build resilience.</p>	<p>In the context of migration, children – and adolescents in particular – are more likely to be sent away by their families to seek work and send back their earnings – both within their countries or internationally.¹⁷ While the extent to which climate-related migration by any person can be considered wholly voluntary is subject to questioning, children may enjoy considerably less agency than adults in making this decision.</p> <p>On the other hand, children that are left behind by migrating parents, in the care of relatives, friends or other community members, are at heightened risk of experiencing negative educational, psychological and even physical impacts as a result of this separation.¹⁸</p> <p>Conversely, voluntary migration, when undertaken in appropriate conditions, may provide an opportunity to better protect and uphold children's rights, including through better access to essential services such as health care and education. Indeed, young people in particular may wish to migrate in order to diversify their skills and seek out more sustainable livelihoods.¹⁹</p>

This failure to capture children’s unique situation and perspectives in research and the prevailing policy discourse has far-reaching implications, including a lack of information and data, awareness, understanding, and provision for their rights and needs in subsequent policy and operational decision-making. In addressing

this oversight, it will also be necessary to take a child’s specific circumstances into consideration, including age, gender, poverty, disability and other economic, social and cultural factors, since these play an important role in shaping their particular vulnerability and needs.

CLIMATE-RELATED MOBILITY: CAVEATS ON TERMINOLOGY FROM A CHILD RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Terminology	Caveats for understanding children & climate-related mobility
<p>Planned relocation occurs when an administrative authority decides that a population is excessively exposed to ‘climate-related’ risk. This could involve moving inland from a coastal zone threatened by sea-level rise, or due to flooding of agricultural locations. Relocation should not take place without the full and informed consent of affected communities, and resettlement should uphold their rights.²⁰ While governments are responsible for the protection of their citizens displaced within their own territory, international law does not provide for situations in which international relocation would need to occur.</p> <p>A further aspect that must be considered is displacement associated with development projects for climate change adaptation and mitigation purposes, such as the construction of hydrodams, and change of land use for biofuel production or forest conservation. While there is a clear need for ambitious and rapid climate action, it is vital for these processes to occur in a manner that respects children’s and local communities’ rights.</p>	<p>In the case of children, these challenges are magnified because of the additional barriers they face in terms of obtaining child-friendly and language-appropriate information, mechanisms for their meaningful participation in decision making, and access to effective and timely remedies for harm.</p> <p>Children are also more likely to experience trauma and psychological harm as a result of moving away from their home into new environments, with long-term implications for their development and health.</p>
<p>In addition, a further category that needs to be considered in the context of mobility, is the situation of ‘trapped’ populations,²¹ or sectors of society that are unable to move, despite wishing to leave an area. They find themselves in a double bind: the adverse effects of climate change that drive their desire to leave also erode their capacity to do so.</p>	<p>These groups tend to be comprised of the most vulnerable – people who are poor, young, old, disabled, infirm and from ethnic and/or religious minorities²² – who face deteriorating conditions and worse risks than many migrants. Children are disproportionately affected among such trapped populations, since many countries experiencing the worst impacts of climate change are not only among the poorest, but also have younger populations, with children making up a larger share of the total population.</p>

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND CLIMATE-RELATED MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND CLIMATE-RELATED MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

HEALTH

Article 24 (health and health services), UNCR: Every child has the right to the best possible health. States must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being.²³

Childhood represents a unique stage of physical, emotional and cognitive growth, particularly for young children, placing them at increased risk from a range of negative health impacts associated with the adverse effects of climate change.²⁴ While the act of moving can reduce exposure to these risks, many risks may be heightened through displacement and migration, including reduced availability of food, clean water and basic hygiene, lack of access to health care and increased exposure to disease.

SAFE DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

The vulnerability of children forced to move in response to climate impacts, combined with the *ad hoc* nature of their movement, leads many to end up in temporary shelters and informal settlements, which often lack access to clean water, sanitation facilities and basic hygiene. This places children at risk of diarrhoea, responsible for the deaths of half a million children under five each year.²⁵ Cramped conditions also encourage the spread of disease

such as pneumonia, the leading infectious cause of death among children under the age of five, responsible for 2,500 fatalities per day in 2015.²⁶

A recent study on climate-displaced children living in slums in Dhaka, Bangladesh, found that children belonging to these communities presented a significantly higher number of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)²⁷ than children who had not been displaced.²⁸ In some communities, this loss was as high as 85 per cent and 70 per cent for diarrhoea and asthma respectively. The study noted that these settlements were becoming ever-more crowded, particularly in the wake of flood and cyclone disasters.

Furthermore, these destinations may themselves be highly exposed to climate-related impacts. They may be positioned on flood plains or in vulnerable coastal areas, for example.²⁹ According to a UNHCR survey in 2015, refugees and internally displaced persons were exposed to 150 disasters in 16 countries between 2013 and 2014, illustrating their vulnerability to disasters associated with natural hazards including floods, severe weather, landslides and fires. High population density was found to be a key determinant of vulnerability and the level of risk.³⁰

Slums like this one in Dhaka are becoming more crowded in the wake of flood and cyclone disasters



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CAMBODIA

CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND AS WATER SHORTAGES SET IN

In Cambodia, poverty represents a key driver of migration.³¹ In the last few years, a prolonged and severe drought has been deepening poverty and exacerbating hardship in the country through its impacts on households' access to safe water and livelihoods, particularly in rural areas.³² Families have reported eating fewer or smaller meals in order to cope,³³ while a common response has been for one member of the household to migrate to an urban area.³⁴

While no reliable national-level data exists on the number of children left behind by domestic migrants, more than 20 per cent of migrants in the capital Phnom Penh are estimated to have left their children behind, frequently with their grandparents in their home villages.³⁵ Studies suggest that children left behind in Cambodia are more likely to drop out of school, to engage in labour, and to be malnourished than children from non-migrant households.³⁶

The estimated 8.3 per cent of all migrants in Cambodia that are aged between 10 and 19 years old³⁷ – along with younger children that are not captured by the data – also face risks such as trafficking, abuse and child labour, as well as barriers to school enrolment and lower rates of birth registration.³⁸ One of the major destinations for migrants from rural areas is Cambodia's burgeoning garment industry, in which children aged 14 and under have been found working – and one in which widespread labour rights abuses have been documented.³⁹ While the number of children migrating outside of the country is unknown, the Mekong Migration Network estimates that the drought and other climate-related factors have caused approximately 5 per cent of Cambodians to migrate across borders, mainly to Thailand.⁴⁰ Thailand's Ministry of Interior estimates that more than 6 per cent of irregular workers in the country are children under the age of 15.⁴¹

FOOD SECURITY

The availability of food may be greatly restricted both during and in the aftermath of slow and sudden-onset climate-related events,⁴² representing a major trigger for migration. Malnutrition represents a major danger to children's lives, contributing to nearly half of all deaths in children under five.⁴³ Undernutrition in the first 24 months of life can be irreversible, with life-long implications for physical, cognitive and reproductive health.⁴⁴

In 2016, drought in India following two consecutive years of weak monsoons affected approximately 330 million people. A study commissioned by Unicef India suggests that the drought resulted in a shrinking food basket for nearly 80 per cent of households across 24 districts in nine affected states, corresponding with a 'mass exodus' to cities in search of livelihood, either temporarily or permanently.⁴⁵ In certain regions almost all men had migrated, with only women, young children and older people left behind.⁴⁶ The severity of recurrent drought has led to changing patterns of seasonal migration, including a higher rate of male adolescents accompanying adults, and a doubling in the amount of time spent away from home, from three to six months. Both have resulted in increased drop-out rates from schools. These young people are likely to find themselves in precarious conditions in the cities, frequently without adequate shelter, food or sources of income.⁴⁷

Migrants are more likely to face physical and economic barriers to food access, including nutritionally adequate and culturally appropriate foods.⁴⁸ These challenges are often amplified for migrants in foreign countries, particularly those that are in irregular situations, where their ability to access food may be further restricted by domestic policies and their legal status, or because they fear deportation, even when resources and land may otherwise be available.⁴⁹ For displaced children and families, food security may be affected by their heavy reliance on host governments or organisations such as the World Food Programme. The impacts of natural disasters on women can lead to mental and physical trauma, affecting a mother's ability to either breastfeed or source safe alternative solutions for her child's nutrition.⁵⁰ Challenges in the physical environment, such as a lack of privacy, may also present obstacles to a mother's ability and willingness to breastfeed, increasing the risk of malnutrition and infectious disease in infants,⁵¹ particularly when education on safe alternative feeding methods is not provided. Sterilising equipment and clean water are both important features of alternative feeding practices, which may be particularly hindered in the context of climate-induced displacement and migration.



HONDURAS

PROLONGED DROUGHT HITS DRY CORRIDOR HARDEST

Between 2014 and April 2016, Honduras suffered one of the most prolonged droughts on record, hitting the country's 'dry corridor' hardest. This territory is home to over 2 million people, of which 42 per cent are children.

The drought reduced harvests by 83 per cent in the region, leading to severe food and nutritional insecurity and poverty. In addition, the school dropout rate increased as households tried to cope by sending children out to work. Crop loss caused prices to skyrocket by up to 20 per cent, making it harder for the population to procure basic products. In this context, families, particularly in rural settings, have had little choice but to reduce both the number and quality of meals, which has increased rates of malnutrition.

The worsening financial conditions have also contributed to increased migration patterns.

In 2015, nearly one in five of surveyed households stated that a household member had migrated at some point during the year. The decisions of 8 per cent of the people who migrated were motivated by crop loss, 3 per cent by lack of water availability, and 79 per cent by loss of employment, illustrating the need for more nuanced discussion and understanding of climate-induced vs 'economic' migration and respective policy responses. Nearly one in 10 of these migrants were children, of whom 12 per cent travelled unaccompanied, significantly increasing their vulnerability to violence, abuse and exploitation. Of those who migrated from the dry corridor in 2015, approximately half headed to Honduras' capital Tegucigalpa, 18 per cent to other areas of the country and 11 per cent across borders – particularly to the United States.⁵²

SHELTER

Article 27 (adequate standard of living)

UNCRC: States have an obligation to ensure that every child enjoys the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development.

Children's right to an adequate standard of living is predicated on their access to safe shelter. In the context of climate-related disasters, severe and irreparable damage to housing, shelter and essential infrastructure are commonplace, leading to short-term or protracted displacement for children and their families.

This situation is perhaps nowhere more stark than in Bangladesh, one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 4.7 million people in Bangladesh were displaced by natural disasters between 2008 and 2014.⁵³ Although disaggregated data is not available, children make up 35 per cent of the general population and therefore likely comprised a large number of those affected.⁵⁴ In addition to these disasters, river erosion has been estimated to displace 50,000 to 200,000 people each year.⁵⁵

Many of those displaced migrate to cities, contributing to explosive urbanisation in the country and challenges associated with densely populated informal settlements.⁵⁶ In the country's capital, Dhaka, an annual influx of 400,000 people from across Bangladesh has made it the fastest growing city on earth. Just less than half of the population live in slums and squatter settlements, and approximately 30 per cent of the city's inhabitants have no access to sanitation.⁵⁷ A sea-level rise of one metre – now considered inevitable, and likely to occur within current lifetimes⁵⁸ – could inundate up to 17.5 per cent of Bangladesh's land mass, displacing tens of millions of Bangladeshis.⁵⁹

EDUCATION

Article 28 (right to education) UNCRC: Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available and accessible to every child. States must take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and reduce drop-out rates

Although children's right to education is enshrined in the UNCRC, in reality education is often one of the first casualties in times

of hardship. Globally, approximately 120 million children are out of primary and lower secondary school and 140 million adolescents are out of upper secondary school.⁶⁰ These figures do not include all displaced, migrant and refugee children, as the data is difficult to obtain. Education is often neglected in the aftermath of moving and may be considered a less immediate priority by host states and humanitarian organisations, in comparison with issues such as shelter and food security. Only half of child refugees globally are enrolled in primary schools globally, and this experience is likely to be indicative for the significantly greater numbers of children whose education is disrupted due to climate-related displacement.⁶¹

In the wake of climate-related disasters, schools may be taken over in order to provide shelter for stricken communities that have lost their homes, or children may be displaced to locations that are simply too far away to make attendance feasible. Some families' means may have been eroded so that they are no longer able to financially support education, or they may now require children to help with domestic tasks or engage in labour to provide additional means of income.⁶² This coping mechanism has significant gendered implications for girls, who are often the first to be removed from schools and who bear the majority of the burden of supporting their mothers in maintaining the household.⁶³ In these situations, adolescents in particular are more likely to be required to migrate, often unaccompanied, in order to work and send back money to the family, leading them to drop out of school.⁶⁴

While migration for educational and training opportunities can represent an important form of adaptation for improving children's future prospects, children seeking to begin or continue their education in new communities are frequently prevented from doing so, particularly where language and cultural barriers exist.⁶⁵ Displaced and migrant children are more likely to encounter discrimination and social exclusion on the basis of their racial or religious identity, particularly when attending schools in an alien environment with different cultures, use of language, religions, foods and school rules. This in itself can lead to bullying and reduction in self-esteem.⁶⁶ Verbal or physical abuse encountered in schools may deter parents from enrolling their children altogether, seriously affecting a child's academic outcomes.⁶⁷ Children that have crossed borders may also be



BANGLADESH

DISAPPEARING VILLAGES: SHATHI'S STORY

Shathi Akter, 13, pictured above with her parents, grew up hearing about the river 'eating up' houses and trees and saw how the banks had been eroded by the tides during monsoon. But when her entire neighbourhood, including her school in a sleepy village in Bhola, south central Bangladesh, disappeared into the river in the course of a week, she was incredulous. "I kept looking and looking, but failed to find any trace of our village in the vast expanse of the water. The river is crazy," Shathi says, recalling the monsoon of 2013.

River erosion is a common problem along the Meghna river basin during the monsoon but the island of Bhola, home to 1.6 million inhabitants, is estimated to have halved in size between 1965 and 2005, a problem that has been attributed to rising sea levels associated with climate change.⁶⁸

Large masses of earth were still being swept away by the river when Shathi and her family took whatever belongings they could carry before the house was gone and left for Dhaka. So many residents of the southern island district lost their villages to the ever-rising tides of the Meghna estuary and migrated to Dhaka in the last couple of decades, that a slum in Mirpur where many of them ended up

living became known as Bhola Bosti (slum of Bhola).

Shathi's father, Shajahan Miah, and his ancestors were fishermen who once enjoyed a stable life near the banks of Meghna. In the last couple of decades, he lost his homestead to the river a staggering seven times. "But I became completely broke when it happened the last time. So, we left for Dhaka with two other families from our village and came to Bhola Bosti with them," he recalls. This type of disruption places a burden on both the family breadwinner and on those dependent on them. For Shathi, moving will mean her education and access to health care are disrupted.

Bhola Bosti is located on a swamp, which residents have been slowly landfilling. In places where the muddy water is too deep to landfill, families construct dwellings perched on bamboo stilts. As multi-storey buildings were constructed on all sides of the swamp over the years, what now remains of it is a long strip of low land filled by corrugated tin shanties on every inch. The darkness, heat and dampness inside the rows of tin shacks are a stark contrast to the scenic beauty of the windy green village by the Meghna.⁶⁹

prevented from learning by restrictive migration policies or lack of legal status.

The impacts of climate-related mobility on children's physical, psychological and cultural health can affect their concentration and performance. Three years after Hurricane Katrina in the United States, more than one third of children who had been displaced or otherwise severely affected by the hurricane were a year or more behind in school, double the pre-storm rate.⁷⁰ Issues with behaviour and negative impacts on attendance, suspension, expulsion and drop-out rates were also observed.^{71;72}

The effects on educational outcomes for children left behind by parents in the migration process are more ambiguous, with empirical studies presenting contradictory findings. While remittances sent home by overseas workers represent a source of stability for many families and can increase investment in education, research suggests that children may be at risk of experiencing educational impairments due to separation from parents, undermining any potential gains.⁷³ In particular, the absence of

mothers has been found to correlate negatively with a child's overall well-being, and notably their educational outcomes. In the Philippines for example, one of most vulnerable countries to climate risk, approximately 10 per cent of the country's workforce is working abroad as temporary migrants, and remittances from abroad account for 10.2 per cent of GDP.⁷⁴ The majority of these workers are women, and many have children that are not permitted to move with them.⁷⁵ Research has found that Filipino children are 5 per cent more likely to struggle at school when their mothers migrate abroad than if their fathers move,⁷⁶ with boys significantly more affected than girls. Further investigation is required to better understand how migration by one or both parents affects children's educational outcomes.

A woman holds her grandson in a shelter for people forced from their homes by Hurricane Katrina



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NEPAL

FLEEING WITH JUST HER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE: NIRJALA'S STORY

In August 2014, a landslide occurred in Nepal, 80km north east of Kathmandu, following intense rainfall in the region that reached near historical levels.⁷⁷ The landslide killed 156 people and destroyed farmland, houses and infrastructure. While deforestation and other human processes play an important role, extreme rainfall has been shown to be a major cause of landslides in the Himalayas.⁷⁸ Changes in rainfall seasons are already occurring as more regular and predictable seasonal patterns are replaced by more random and extreme rainfall events. This alteration has been attributed to climate change.⁷⁹

“It was a very scary moment, and I couldn’t think of anything else than grabbing my mobile phone and my school certificate

before I ran out of the house,” says 18-year-old Nirjala, pictured. “I secured my certificate because only this will help me establish a bright future.”

The landslide killed some of her friends and destroyed her school. Her family also lost its paddy field, which was the mainstay of their livelihood. Nirjala’s house was just metres away from the landslide and is now uninhabitable. Nirjala’s family is one of 10 families that now live in tents in a former factory, too afraid to rebuild their home in case another disaster strikes. Her parents have found new employment; her mother works in a local restaurant while her father is working in Kuwait.

PROTECTION

Article 19 (protection from violence, abuse and neglect) UNCRC: States must take all possible measures to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse or neglect while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 32 (child labour) UNCRC: States must protect children from economic exploitation and work that is dangerous or might harm their health, development or education. States must set a minimum age for children to work and ensure that work conditions are safe and appropriate.

Article 34 (sexual exploitation) UNCRC: States must protect children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Article 35 (abduction, sale and trafficking) UNCRC: States should take all measures possible to ensure that children are not abducted, sold or trafficked. This provision in the Convention is augmented by the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

The often chaotic and highly vulnerable conditions in which climate-induced displacement and migration occur can present significant risks of physical and psychological harm to children, including through heightened exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse. Moreover, there is an increasing degree of confidence that the impacts of climate change, including its role in triggering displacement and migration, may affect the likelihood of conflict, presenting further risks to children and their rights.

Climate-related displacement and migration has been associated with a range of psychological impacts triggered by circumstances during and after movement, including loss of family members or separation from care givers, experiencing traumatic events, and exposure to risks in the post-disaster context. Loss of familiar surroundings and adjusting to a new environment can also be a source of significant stress for children. Children displaced by Hurricane Katrina were approximately five times more likely to present signs of serious emotional distress when compared against a sample prior to the hurricane.⁸⁰ Children from New Orleans unable to return to the city experienced more post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and other trauma than those able to

move within the city,⁸¹ suggesting that children displaced externally are likely to be affected more negatively than those able to stay close to home.

In the Pacific Islands, where increasing sea-level rise and salt water intrusion has led to high numbers of children moving to urban areas in order to continue their education in places with more resilient infrastructure, children were found to be exposed to heightened risk of all forms of abuse when they stayed with extended family.⁸² The impacts of such abuse can have a lasting negative impact on a child's physical and emotional health and development.⁸³

Children living in internally displaced persons' camps following disasters are at risk of physical and psychological violence, exploitation and abuse, including as a result of peer group violence and gang behaviour.⁸⁴ Parents, under immense stress and traumatised by their experiences and situation, can also be responsible for perpetrating this type of abuse.⁸⁵ Furthermore, camps rarely accommodate the gender-specific protection needs of women and children, who may put off going to the toilet until it is dark and they can find privacy, exposing themselves to the risk of sexual violence.

The circumstances of climate change-related displacement such as the separation of families, confusion and desperation can combine to create a perfect storm in which child trafficking can thrive. For example, in India, meltwater from Himalayan glaciers is having a profound impact on children downstream. In the last 50 years, the state of Assam has lost 386,000 hectares of land to erosion and 800,000 hectares are flooded each year as the Brahmaputra River bursts its banks. These processes, combined with ethnic violence and weak social institutions, have led to widespread internal displacement, with many left homeless and living in relief camps indefinitely. In these conditions, trafficking has thrived and the area has been identified as one of the largest sources of child trafficking in the country, with girls in particular forced into marriage, domestic servitude, cheap labour, and sexual exploitation.⁸⁶

In times of hardship, child marriage is also likely to increase.⁸⁷ Families in crisis may be inclined to part with their daughters in order to increase their ability to cope by reducing the size of their family. Families may also view marriage as representing a positive escape route for their

young daughters, particularly when faced with displacement, loss of status as landowners, and increasing hardship.⁸⁸ Child marriage restricts girls' social and economic opportunities, especially access to education, and leads to early pregnancy, which is associated with profound health complications.⁸⁹

Unaccompanied children that migrate internally or across borders to seek work and send back remittances, particularly by irregular channels, may be exposed to multiple protection risks, both in transit and at destination. Teenage girls in particular are at heightened risk of sexual violence and exploitation, including at borders when corrupt government officials or smugglers may demand sex in exchange for onward passage.⁹⁰ Migrant children are also at risk of experiencing the worst forms of child labour,⁹¹ as their irregular status may lead them to end up in the informal sector, in domestic servitude, or in other situations that prevent effective protection and monitoring of their well-being.⁹²

CONFLICT

Article 38 (war and armed conflicts) UNCRC: States must not allow children under the age of 15 to take part in war or join the armed forces. States must take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children affected by war and armed conflicts.

Article 22 (refugee children) UNCRC: If a child is seeking refuge or has refugee status, states must provide them with appropriate protection and assistance to help them enjoy all of their rights under the Convention. States must co-operate in efforts to reunite unaccompanied and separated children with their families.

Children are especially vulnerable to conflict, through exposure to physical and psychological harm, family separation, and the impacts of conflict on access to food, health care and education.⁹³ Although it is challenging to ascertain direct causality between climate change, migration and conflict, there is increasing consensus that climate change can influence the likelihood of conflict due to its role in exacerbating other social, political and economic stressors, which in themselves can contribute to the outbreak of conflict.⁹⁴

For example, it is likely that the shrinking of

Lake Chad to a tenth of its former size due to climate change and water extraction in the context of increasing populations has caused the movement of people and contributed to the pressures triggering the conflict in the region.⁹⁵ To date, 2.6 million people, including 1.5 million children, have been displaced by the humanitarian crisis in and around the Lake Chad Basin, putting them at risk of violence and malnutrition.⁹⁶

Similarly, studies have traced a connection between climate change and the prolonged and devastating drought in Syria between 2006 and 2011, responsible for driving a mass exodus of farmers and rural families to Syrian cities. This shock, combined with a range of other economic, political and social grievances, has been cited as a contributing factor to the outbreak of unrest and the subsequent conflict.⁹⁷ The consequences to Syria's children of this humanitarian crisis – the largest in the world – are catastrophic and continue to severely violate the most basic rights of millions.⁹⁸

A boy collects water for his family in Aleppo, Syria. Conflict has raged in the country for six years.



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A girl wades through flood water in Kiribati

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Article 8 (protection and preservation of identity) UNCRC: Every child has the right to an identity. States must respect and protect that right, and prevent the child's name, nationality or family relationships from being changed unlawfully.

Article 30 (children from minority or indigenous groups) UNCRC: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their group.

While climate change results in clear material loss and damage, its impacts also carry clear non-material implications for children's rights to agency, identity and culture. Movement necessarily separates people from their homes and may prevent children from developing a relationship to their cultural heritage, which is often deeply attached to land and to a sense of geographical place. Having a strong sense of their own cultural history and traditions helps children to build a positive cultural identity for themselves, and supports their sense of

belonging and self-esteem.⁹⁹ Conversely, severing ties to a place and disruption of social networks may lead to a sense of loss, grief and anxiety.¹⁰⁰ Even an awareness that relocation may be necessary in future can represent a deep source of uncertainty and psychological stress for children.¹⁰¹

In the Small Island Developing States, sea-level rise associated with climate change poses an existential challenge to these countries' territory, and inhabitants face permanent displacement from their land. Research on the Pacific Islands stresses the importance of land for both culture and identity, including the concept of 'Fenua', which explains the way in which Pacific community identity is directly linked to a specific part of an island.¹⁰²

The connection between land, culture and identity comes into particularly sharp relief when considering indigenous children, whose ways of life and world views are inextricably linked to their territory of origin. Impacts on their natural environment and resources, and potential separation from – or loss of – their homeland therefore carry profound implications for their specific rights to enjoy and learn about

their culture, language and beliefs, and to preserve and protect their collective identity, including as custodians of their traditions for future generations.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the possibility of communities' fragmentation following internal or international resettlement would have severe consequences for the ability of indigenous children to exercise their collective cultural rights with members of their group.¹⁰⁴

In host communities, indigenous groups may face double discrimination as both migrants and indigenous peoples, and lack access to education that respects their cultural identity. These unique impacts are likely to compound the multiple discrimination that indigenous children already face as one of the most marginalised groups in society, including poverty, reduced rates of birth registration, reduced access to education, racism and exclusion from political and economic processes.¹⁰⁵

PARTICIPATION

Article 12 (respect for the views of the child)

UNCRC: Every child has the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.

Article 13 (freedom of expression) UNCRC:

Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information.

The extent to which climate-related displacement and migration will undermine children's rights or increase children's opportunities and well-being will depend on their rights being considered at all stages of planning and response strategies and actions taken by States and other actors. This includes, notably, their right to be heard. As one of the most sizeable and vulnerable groups affected, involving children in decision-making and incorporating their views will be essential to establishing effective, legitimate and sustainable interventions.

A group of boys stand in flood water in a refugee camp in South Sudan



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PANAMA

COMMUNITIES DISPLACED BY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS



A man holds his son in front of the Barro Blanco dam

In Panama, the Barro Blanco dam is a 28.84 MW hydroelectric project that threatens to undermine the rights of the Ngäbe Buglé indigenous communities who live alongside the Tabasara River, including thousands of children. Several settlements will be flooded, making relocation necessary and endangering 5,000 indigenous peoples' subsistence livelihoods and water sources. The area under threat contains a school, cemeteries, sacred petroglyphs and medicinal plants which are used to cure snakebites. The construction company failed to undertake due diligence, to consult the community or to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before it began operations.¹⁰⁶ During subsequent clashes between Ngäbe Bugle protestors and security forces, children were beaten and a 13 year-old girl was allegedly raped.¹⁰⁷ In November 2016, the Panamanian Government withdrew its registration of the dam under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Clean

Development Mechanism (CDM), which is designed to encourage investments that reduce emissions and promote sustainable development.¹⁰⁸ While this decision does not signal a halt to the project's implementation, it does reinforce the case for the CDM – and its successor, the Sustainable Development Mechanism – to integrate more robust social and environmental safeguards, in line with consistent calls from human rights advocates.¹⁰⁹

As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment has stated:

“The urgency of addressing climate change does not justify violating the rights of those who live and work near the projects. On the contrary, safeguards are necessary not only to protect human rights, but also to avoid abuses that can derail projects and harm the very people that the projects are supposed to help”.¹¹⁰

Children in the Philippines create a model of their village to help identify climate-related risks.



PHILIPPINES

A CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The Philippines Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act (Republic Act No. 10821) is a ground-breaking law built upon experiences and best practices during recent disasters and based on consultation with Filipino children. It is the first national legislation worldwide that both sets out measures to prevent displacement and to protect children who have been displaced, seeking to ensure that rights to life, liberty, dignity and security are not violated. Specifically, it includes a child-focused Comprehensive Emergency Program that guarantees the delivery of basic needs, the establishment of evacuation centres and transitional centres for orphaned, separated and unaccompanied children, increased protection against child trafficking, exploitation and violence, and plans to minimise the time children spend without important documentation and education, as well as a focus on measures to improve data collection and reporting on children affected. To implement the program, people who respond in an emergency will receive child-centred training and there will be increased participation of children in disaster risk

reduction (DRR) planning and post-disaster needs assessments.¹¹¹

Unicef has been assisting the Filipino Government to implement child-centred climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction planning and projects, including through innovative community-based participatory 3D mapping exercises. The activity enables children to work alongside other community members to develop models of their villages, and to identify climate-related hazards such as floods and storm surges. Children help to establish baseline data and point out hazard-prone areas, such as houses made of light materials or households with persons with disabilities. The project has allowed for the risk mapping of some of the most hazard prone villages in the country, while building a common understanding among community members of the risks at hand.¹¹² The project demonstrates how children have a critical role to play in building their own and their communities' resilience to the impacts of climate change, when equipped with the skills and means to do so.

THE GLOBAL POLICY CONTEXT



THE GLOBAL POLICY CONTEXT

Despite the near universal ratification of the UNCRC, children's rights are frequently neglected in the context of policies and action related to climate change, and in the emerging body of processes and initiatives that address climate change-related displacement and migration in particular. In the absence of an international legal framework that grants legal status and protection to these vulnerable migrants – and recognising that many children will be displaced or migrate internally – it is vital that States ensure that humanitarian, sustainable development, climate change, migration and disaster risk reduction frameworks are firmly underpinned by their child rights obligations as core principles. In

particular, the best interest of the child must be a primary consideration in all decision-making affecting children.

Several promising avenues across a multitude of processes exist. However, some are currently limited in their scope, or by the extent to which they consider children's rights.

Children play on the shores of Lake Chad. Climate change and water extraction have shrunk the lake, forcing families to move



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FRAMEWORK

THE PARIS AGREEMENT & UNFCCC

The Paris Agreement sets out a global framework for avoiding dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C, and to pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial temperatures. The Agreement contains the strongest human rights language of any environmental treaty, and affirms that: “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.”

Migrants are also mentioned in Paragraph 50 of the Agreement’s accompanying Decision, in relation to Loss and Damage. Specifically, the decision mandates the creation of a task force under the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism to “avert, minimise and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change” (UNFCCC, 2015). The text does not provide clarity on whether ‘displacement’ relates to forced or voluntary movement, internal or cross-border movement, and there is no acknowledgement of the positive effects of migration or measures required to harness these.¹¹³

Although the task force’s mandate does not explicitly take up human rights in its work, opportunities include:

- Ensuring that children’s voices are heard through their meaningful participation in the work of the task force
- Efforts to “complement, draw upon the work of and involve” relevant organisations and expert bodies from both within and outside the UNFCCC to develop recommendations – this should include child and human rights experts
- Identifying best practices.¹¹⁴

In addition, the new five year work plan of the Executive Committee includes a focus on vulnerable populations and communities, as well as migration, displacement and human mobility,¹¹⁵ although these are treated as distinct action areas and the specific rights of children are not recognised in this context.

The UNFCCC Cancun Adaptation Framework recognises climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation as forms of adaptation, and also emphasises respect for human rights, although these two areas are not explicitly brought together.¹¹⁶

FRAMEWORK

NATIONAL CLIMATE POLICIES

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), the successor to National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), are still being developed and offer an important opportunity for countries to incorporate climate-induced displacement and migration in their development planning, and to ensure that child rights are mainstreamed. Two-thirds of NAPAs referred to migration, but only in negative terms, and providing little detail on strategies to reduce or facilitate movement.¹¹⁷

Less than one in three national climate plans (Nationally Determined Contributions) put forward by countries under the Paris Agreement refer to children – the vast majority in passing.¹¹⁸ Only 20 per cent of NDCs refer to mobility.¹¹⁹ Children’s rights and migration remain overlooked in climate policy making, representing a fundamental gap both as issues in their own right, and in terms of the significant connections between them.

<p>FRAMEWORK</p>	<p>THE AGENDA FOR THE PROTECTION OF CROSS-BORDER DISPLACED PERSONS IN THE CONTEXT OF DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE (NANSEN INITIATIVE FOLLOW-UP)</p>
<p>The Protection Agenda provides guidelines to States for cross-border displacement, aiming to fill the protection gap. It was the outcome of the Nansen Initiative, a State-led, bottom-up consultative process to build consensus on how to protect and assist displaced persons. It notes that: <i>“persons who have moved across international borders in disaster contexts are protected by human rights law, and where applicable refugee law...While a small number of states have national laws or bilateral or (sub-)regional agreements that specifically address the admission or temporary stay of foreigners displaced by disasters, the vast majority of countries lack any normative framework.”</i>¹²⁰ The Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) seeks to implement and extend the work of the Agenda, including a focus on the plight of vulnerable groups such as children. This represents an important opportunity to integrate child rights as core principles of the PDD, and to apply a child rights lens to the blurred lines between forced and voluntary migration.</p>	
<p>FRAMEWORK</p>	<p>THE NEW YORK DECLARATION FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS</p>
<p>Adopted in 2016, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants recognises climate change and the complexity of the drivers of forced migration:</p> <p><i>“Some people move in search of new economic opportunities and horizons. Others move to escape armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations and abuses. Still others do so in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters (some of which may be linked to climate change) or other environmental factors. Many move, indeed, for a combination of these reasons.”</i></p> <p>The Outcome Document contains a commitment to protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants, including specific content on the right to education for child migrants, the prevention of sexual abuse and an end to the detention of children while their status is ascertained. Voluntary guidelines on <i>“the treatment of migrants in vulnerable situations (especially unaccompanied and separated children) who do not qualify for international protection as refugees and who may need assistance”</i> will be developed, along with a new ‘Global Compact’ for safe, orderly and regular migration in 2018, offering an important opportunity to protect and assist children displaced or migrating in response to impacts associated with climate change.</p>	

HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES & MONITORING MECHANISMS

FRAMEWORK

INITIATIVES BY UN HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES AND MONITORING MECHANISMS

Numerous initiatives are under way, which have direct relevance to child rights and climate-induced migration and displacement. These offer significant avenues for clarifying guidance. In particular:

- Existing normative frameworks such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement¹²¹ and the Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States¹²² offer a firm basis for a human rights-based approach to the needs of those internally displaced by climate change. Building on these, the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee recently considered a research proposal that included a recommendation “to undertake to prepare guidelines (‘soft guidelines’) on climate displacement and human rights”.¹²³
- The Human Rights Council, composed of 47 States, has mandated OHCHR to prepare a panel discussion and detailed analytical study on the impacts of climate change on the rights of the child in 2017, and is likely to include a focus on this nexus.
- The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) held its biennial Day of General Discussion on child rights and the environment in 2016, including a focus on climate change. Discussions and written submissions included content on climate-induced migration and displacement, presenting opportunities for this issue to be taken up by the Committee in future, including through the Joint General Comment on the Human Rights of Children in the Context of International Migration, under preparation by the CRC and the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.
- The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment will dedicate his 2018 mandate to the issue of child rights and the environment, while reports from the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced people and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants respectively have addressed climate-induced displacement.¹²⁴

FRAMEWORK

SEDAI FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION 2015-2030

This framework sets out four action-oriented priorities for States (to understand disaster risk; improve risk governance; build resilience through disaster risk reduction (DRR); and improve preparedness and recovery).¹²⁵ The framework recognises the impacts of climate-induced displacement, the links between disaster risk management and protection of human rights, the positive role that migrants can play in building resilience, children’s specific needs in the context of disaster risk, and the role of children and young people as agents of change. The global target to substantially increase the number of countries with national and local DRR strategies by 2020 represents an important opportunity to bring these elements together.

FRAMEWORK

THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

92 per cent of the SDG’s 169 targets can be directly linked to human rights,¹²⁶ and the SDGs affirm the capacities of children, including the need for climate-related plans to consider youth under SDG13 on climate action.¹²⁷ However, climate, displacement and migration issues are not brought together in the framework, including under SDG13 or under Goal 10’s focus on facilitating “orderly, safe and regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”. All countries have an opportunity to consider these links in their national implementation plans.

FRAMEWORK

THE NEW URBAN AGENDA (HABITAT III)

The recent Habitat III Conference produced a New Urban Agenda which provides global guidance on how to engender sustainable development and build resilience through 20 years of action, recognising climate change and disasters as central threats to sustainable urbanisation. The Agenda incorporates a strong focus on the human rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, as well as the rights and needs of children, including the need for both groups to be engaged in dialogue. However, migration and climate change are treated as two distinct issues in urban areas, and the document does not refer to the exacerbating effects of climate change on rural-urban migration, or call for planning that recognises this trend.¹²⁸

DEVELOPMENT & DISASTER RISK

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

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 Child¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰

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.

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