

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## FUTURES AT RISK: PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

In 2020 alone, weather-related events were linked to 30.1 million new internal displacements, including 9.8 million new displacements of children.

© UNICEF/Sokhin



A boy walks home from school near Aberao village in Kiribati. Kiribati is one of the countries most affected by sea level rise. During high tide many villages become inundated making large parts of the villages uninhabitable.

### **The climate crisis is a child rights crisis.**

Though children are least responsible for the global emissions that have led to the warming of the planet, they feel the greatest impacts. While climate change will have many repercussions, an often overlooked but critically important element is the likely increase of displacement and migration.

Already, children, their families and communities around the world have been displaced due to weather-related impacts, which can increase in frequency or be intensified by climate change. In 2020 alone, weather-related events – whether or not climate change-related – were linked to 30.1 million new displacements, including 9.8 million new internal displacements of children.

**That equates to almost 26,900 new weather-related child displacements every day.**

The exact number of children predicted to be migrating or displaced for reasons linked to climate change is challenging to determine due to a lack of reliable, accurate, and age-disaggregated data. However, estimates from the World Bank suggest that in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, over 143 million people could migrate internally due to the impacts of climate change by 2050.

While figures are uncertain, what is clear is that when families move and children are displaced, access to education and health services is often disrupted. This report makes recommendations to the UK Government ahead of its hosting of COP26, setting out how it can mitigate the impacts of climate change-related displacement and migration by strengthening education and health systems to make them more resilient and ready to respond to the shocks we know are coming.

### **ADDRESSING AND PREVENTING CLIMATE CHANGE**

The countries most affected by climate change and related displacement and migration are also those that have contributed least to the changing climate; that is to say, lower-income countries (LICs). Given this imbalance between LICs' contribution to and impacts from climate change, high-income countries (HICs), including the UK, have a responsibility to support those communities affected by climate change, including children and families on the move.

And while some level of displacement and migration is inevitable, efforts must be made to reduce the likelihood of these patterns through

climate change mitigation and adaptation. To do this, **HICs, including the UK, must act rapidly to reduce carbon emissions, reaching net zero as soon as possible.** The UK has already set out an ambitious target to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 – a welcome commitment that must be fully implemented and mirrored by other HICs. The positive impact this could have on the rights of people at risk of displacement is clear: across five countries in South Asia alone, limiting global warming to an increase of between 1.5°C and 2°C could protect more than 44 million people from displacement by 2050.

## DEFINITIONS, DRIVERS, AND PATTERNS

Defining climate change-related displacement and migration is as challenging as it is to measure. Many different terms are used for human movement related to weather and climate change, including environmental migration, climate displacement and migration, human movement in the context of climate change, and climate refugees, among others. Climate change-related displacement and migration can generally be grouped into four categories: **displacement, migration, planned relocation, and immobility.**

**Displacement** related to climate change is associated with involuntary movement, often caused by the threat or effects of a sudden

or slow onset disaster. Displaced families will often move suddenly, for the short-term, and usually internally or immediately cross-border.

**Migration** related to climate change is a form of movement that implies (at least to some degree) that the move is voluntary. While migration implies voluntariness, there remains a question about the degree to which any climate change-related move is voluntary. Migration is usually long-term, if not permanent, and (as with displacement) often occurs internally or immediately cross-border. The causes of migration are complex and intersecting, related not only to the direct impacts of the changing climate, such as sea level rise and increasing frequency of droughts, but also subsequent economic impacts that can challenge families' livelihoods.

Another form of climate change-related displacement and migration (in the broadest sense) is **planned relocation.** Planned relocation is a process by which the State assists persons or groups of persons to move away from their homes to new places, temporarily or permanently, and occurs within national borders.

In exploring this issue, it is important also to recognise those communities and individuals that do not, choose not to, or cannot move. These populations are sometimes referred to as 'trapped' or 'voluntarily immobile', though we use the term **immobility.**

Children play on a fallen tree that came down during Cyclone Pam and crushed a car on the outskirts of Port Vila in Vanuatu.



Limiting global warming to an increase of between 1.5°C and 2°C could protect more than 44 million people from displacement by 2050.



## COMPOUNDING VULNERABILITIES

Children are not a uniform nor homogenous group. As such, care must be given to the unique needs of particular children as we look to address the impacts of climate change-related displacement and migration. Some children, including girls, children with disabilities, and children living in conflict-settings or displaced by conflict, experience compounding vulnerabilities that can further limit their access to education and health systems.



Two mothers play with their toddlers after visiting the health centre in Alta Verapaz, north-central Guatemala.

## EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Articles 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) set out every child's right to a quality education. And yet, around the world, 258 million children and youth are out of school, and more than half of children living in low- and middle-income countries are unable to read a simple story by the age of 10. Climate change-related displacement and migration thus adds another layer of complexity to the existing **learning crisis**.

The obstacles faced by children affected by climate change-related displacement and migration include disruption in emergencies, as well as systemic and administrative, geographical, economic, sociocultural, and legal barriers. While more research is needed, emerging solutions offer possibilities for strengthening education systems to support the needs of children migrating or displaced in the context of climate change.

Around the world, 258 million children and youth are out of school.



Koumbéré, age 12, from near Mopti, central Mali, revises at night in her home. Koumbéré attends a community learning centre after her school was forced to close due to insecurity. UNICEF has helped to supported learning for 7,500 children like Koumbéré who are no longer in school because of instability in the regions of Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Segou.

## Challenges and Emerging Solutions in Education Systems

Challenges	Emerging solutions
Disruption in weather-related emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), as part of risk-informed education programming</li> <li>■ Indigenous knowledge</li> <li>■ Community awareness</li> </ul>
Systemic/administrative barriers, such as inflexible curricula and overcrowded classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Strong literacy foundations prior to displacement or migration</li> <li>■ Flexible pathways to return to the classroom</li> <li>■ Catch-up learning</li> <li>■ Teacher training to support students falling behind</li> <li>■ Systems strengthening and resilience</li> <li>■ Integrating education into national adaptation plans and strategies</li> </ul>
Geographical barriers, such as impossible, long, or dangerous journeys to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Temporary learning facilities</li> <li>■ Preparing inclusive distance learning materials</li> <li>■ Teacher training for remote learning</li> </ul>
Economic barriers, such as unaffordable school fees or the need to support the family through work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Investment in socioeconomic development of communities</li> <li>■ Offering additional services in school</li> <li>■ Supporting skills development to prepare learners facing displacement or migration</li> </ul>
Sociocultural barriers, such as xenophobia and discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Developing welcoming environments for displaced and migrant children</li> <li>■ Language-in-education policies</li> <li>■ Securing high-level support for integrating displaced or migrating children</li> </ul>
Legal barriers, such as lack of legal documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Effective policies to integrate displaced and migrant children into education systems</li> <li>■ Securing high-level support for integrating displaced or migrating children</li> </ul>

In addition to these barriers, compounding factors further hinder displaced or migrating children's access to education. Harmful gender norms and dynamics, for instance, intersect with climate change-related displacement and migration to further obstruct access to education for girls. Indeed, girls in displaced and migrating families in need of labour and domestic support are among the first to be pulled out of school and often bear the brunt of supporting mothers in the household. Challenges associated with mental health can further compound the barriers children face in

education, as children affected by trauma can find it difficult to concentrate and may exhibit anti-social behaviour as they work through their complex emotions.

Even if children are in education, attainment and completion can prove difficult. It is well-documented that moving can affect children's academic performance and school retention, with children displaced by conflict often falling behind their non-displaced peers both in terms of enrolment and achievement.

## HEALTH SYSTEMS

Article 24 of the UNCRC sets out every child’s right to the highest attainable standard of health. Yet hundreds of millions of children around the globe do not have access to healthcare. Millions more lack access to safe drinking water, adequate nutrition, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities – all factors affecting children’s health. Without proper planning, climate change-related displacement and migration threatens to weaken health systems, exacerbate health challenges for children around the globe, and stall progress toward global health commitments.

The impacts of displacement, migration, and climate change have already been felt by health systems, children’s health, and children’s access to health services. Understanding the multitude of health challenges that children may face is essential to strengthening health systems and ensuring that services are accessible to all. Importantly, working to achieve **universal health coverage** by investing in primary healthcare should be the foundation of all health systems strengthening efforts.

### Challenges and Emerging Solutions in Health Systems

Challenges	Emerging solutions
Disruption in weather-related emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Incorporating DRR strategies into health sector planning</li> <li>■ Developing contingency plans for the deployment of health personnel and resources during and after disasters</li> <li>■ Utilising mobile health clinics during emergencies</li> </ul>
Economic barriers, such as out-of-pocket expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Working toward free at the point of use primary care</li> </ul>
Legal barriers, such as barriers to healthcare for children without documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Eliminating legal obstacles to accessing care for all migrant populations</li> <li>■ Using firewalls to protect migrant and displaced populations’ access to care</li> </ul>
Sociocultural barriers, such as xenophobia and discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Training healthcare workers to provide culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive and child-friendly care</li> <li>■ Investing in on-site or phone-based translation services</li> <li>■ Providing culturally and linguistically appropriate information to migrant and displaced populations</li> </ul>
Administrative barriers, such as lost or destroyed medical records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Developing cloud-based medical record systems</li> </ul>
Geographical barriers, such as a lack of rural facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Relocating community clinics and NGO service providers to areas with limited access to services</li> <li>■ Utilising home-based community health care delivery</li> <li>■ Developing mobile and digital health platforms</li> </ul>



In addition to the barriers already identified, girls, children experiencing poor mental health and trauma, and those living in urban settlements face unique and additional challenges in accessing healthcare. Lack of gender-sensitive services and stigma surrounding sexual and reproductive health and rights may prevent girls from accessing contraception or lead to disruptions in menstrual hygiene management, a phenomenon that has been well-documented in humanitarian settings. Migrant and displaced adolescent girls may also be at risk of becoming pregnant without access to reproductive

counselling or comprehensive prenatal or maternal support. In addition, children affected by climate change-related displacement and migration may face mental health challenges, such as trauma following disasters or stress and anxiety due to disruption in family and community ties. Finally, children in urban settlements face a unique set of additional vulnerabilities, as the cities and poorer urban areas within which their families reside contribute to poor health outcomes and often lack accessible health services.

Article 24 of the UNCRC sets out every child's right to the highest attainable standard of health. Yet hundreds of millions of children around the globe do not have access to healthcare.

© UNICEF/Page



A father carries his daughter across flooded land in Sindh, Pakistan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

As climate change-related displacement and migration increases, ensuring that children can continue to realise their rights to education and health is the role of all UNCRC duty bearers around the world, including the UK. Without urgent action, displaced and migrating children will encounter systems that are unprepared to support their needs, putting their lives and futures at risk.

**But by preparing now, these same systems can be adapted and built to minimise disruption and ensure no child is left without access to education or health services.**

Addressing climate change-related displacement and migration is also critical to achieving the UK Government's Manifesto commitments: with girls disproportionately affected by the challenges ahead, supporting systems strengthening in the context of climate change and related migration and displacement is critical to delivering 12 years of quality education for every girl. And in order to end preventable child deaths, the UK Government must recognise and support children under five who are at increased risk as their families are on the move due to the effects of climate change.



### Core recommendation

The UK Government should support the rights and needs of displaced and migrating children in the context of climate change by **facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration through the establishment of a technical facility on climate change-related displacement and migration and child rights.**

This facility should comprise practitioners, experts, academics, youth, civil society, and government representatives from across the health, education, migration, and climate sectors, providing a platform to share knowledge and best practice on systems strengthening in the context of climate change-related displacement and migration. **The facility should be launched at COP26, aligning with the UK Government's priorities on climate change adaptation and resilience.**



In addition to establishing the technical facility, the UK Government can support the rights of children affected by climate change-related displacement and migration by:

- **Addressing and limiting climate change**

Fully realise its commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and encourage other HICs to make a similar pledge at COP26.

- **Supporting data and evidence collection**

Invest in data and evidence for children affected by climate change-related displacement and migration by joining the International Data Alliance for Children on the Move and investing in collection of climate change-related data through this platform by COP26.

- **Raising awareness and championing children affected by climate change-related displacement and migration**

Use the UK's role as a leading international donor to champion the rights of children affected by climate change-related displacement and migration, ensuring they are highlighted in key COP26 outputs and discussions.

**At the systems level, the UK Government should use the emerging solutions laid out in this report to inform and inspire their work on system strengthening, resilience, and preparedness. Concretely, these emerging solutions can be promoted by the UK Government through:**

	EDUCATION	HEALTH
<b>Committing to long-term systems strengthening in education and health programming</b>	Connect UK Aid to long term systems strengthening results through all plans, programmes, and approaches	Connect UK Aid to long term health systems strengthening results through all plans and approaches, including the publication of the Ending Preventable Deaths Action Plan and Health Systems Strengthening Framework
<b>Investing in the long-term resilience and sustainability of systems</b>	Deliver a successful Global Partnership for Education replenishment in 2021, reaching US \$5 billion, and using the Global Education Summit to advance education resilience	Prioritise funding for Primary Health Care that strengthens health systems in bilateral programming and invest in multilaterals that centre health systems strengthening in their strategies
<b>Championing DRR and disaster preparedness in education and health systems</b>	Work with countries to embed DRR and other emerging solutions for education into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and national climate change strategies	Work with countries to incorporate health sector planning into NAPs and Health-NAPs

## Conclusion

Climate change is having, and will continue to have, an impact on children and their rights. As global temperatures increase, children and their families will increasingly feel its effects, and – in the most severe cases – be forced to leave their homes. With the future patterns of climate change set out, education and health systems must be built to withstand the shocks we know are coming.

This year, 2021, offers a poignant opportunity to put the rights of children affected by climate change-related displacement and migration front and centre. With key education and health events throughout the year, as well as COP26 in November 2021, the UK Government has the chance to lead a course to deliver resilient education and health systems that address these children’s needs. **The opportunity is clear and the need urgent. The UK Government must act now to support the right to education and health, for every child.**

