



# Children uprooted in a changing climate

Turning challenges into opportunities  
with and for young people on the move



The purpose of this brief is to spark conversation on the critical connection between climate, mobility and childhood – and its implications for policy and investment. By looking at what we know, where the worst impacts of climate change, fragility and conflict overlap, and where child mobility is both a consequence and a coping strategy, we get a clearer picture of how mobility can be leveraged to turn these challenges into opportunities – with and for children and young people uprooted from their homes.

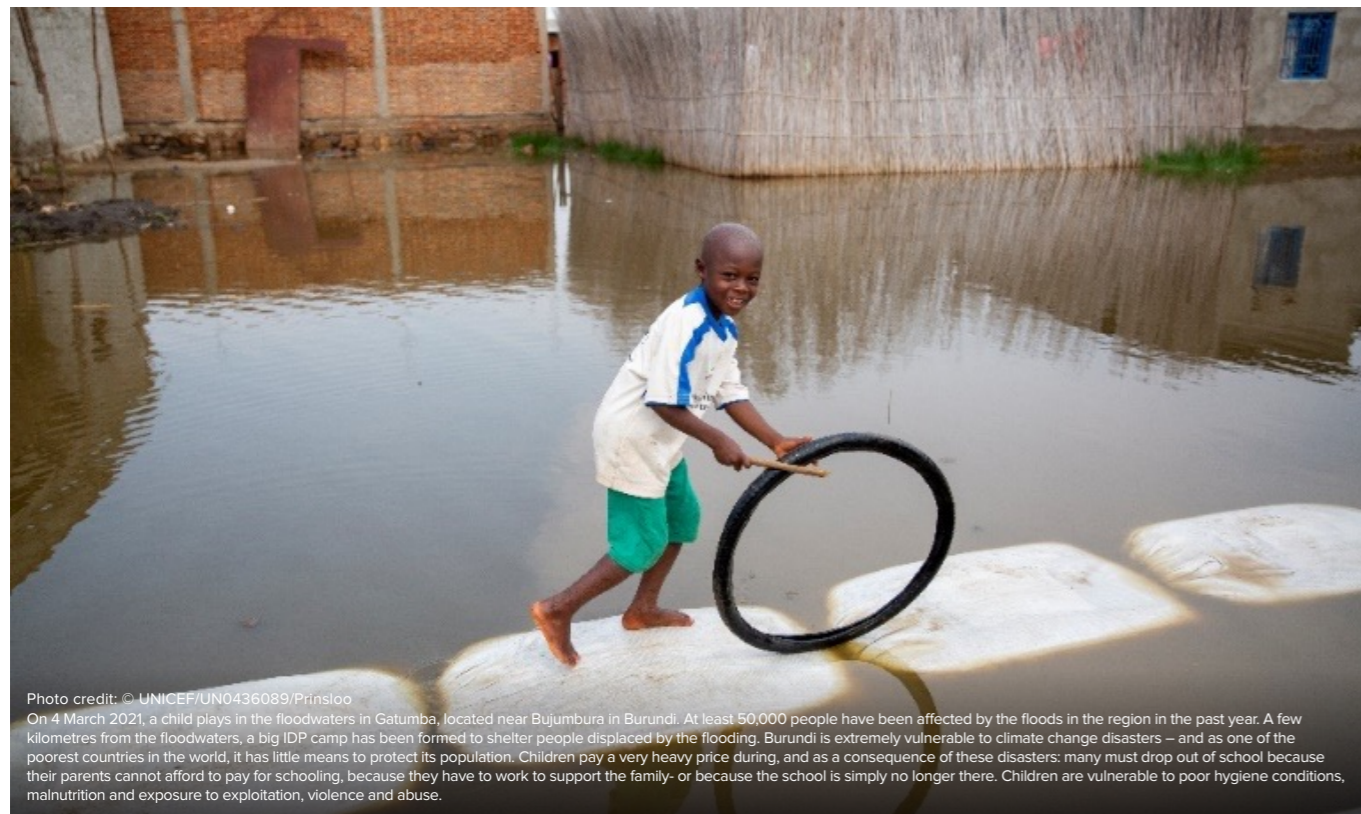


Photo credit: © UNICEF/UN0436089/Prinsloo  
On 4 March 2021, a child plays in the floodwaters in Gatumba, located near Bujumbura in Burundi. At least 50,000 people have been affected by the floods in the region in the past year. A few kilometres from the floodwaters, a big IDP camp has been formed to shelter people displaced by the flooding. Burundi is extremely vulnerable to climate change disasters – and as one of the poorest countries in the world, it has little means to protect its population. Children pay a very heavy price during, and as a consequence of these disasters: many must drop out of school because their parents cannot afford to pay for schooling, because they have to work to support the family- or because the school is simply no longer there. Children are vulnerable to poor hygiene conditions, malnutrition and exposure to exploitation, violence and abuse.

“The fight against climate change and environmental degradation is a fight for our future. This is why we need young people to stand up for climate action in their cities, states and countries... We also ask developed nations to work together to welcome more environmentally displaced people within their borders, providing them safety and accommodation. This is a sign of international solidarity, at a time when we are seeing a lot of people leaving their homeland due to climate change and environmental degradation.”<sup>1</sup>

Kibiriti Majuto, 23-year-old refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

## A deepening climate crisis

The future looks grim. Climate change is already a direct challenge to children’s rights and well-being. According to UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI), one billion children – nearly half of children globally – are at ‘extremely high risk’ of the impacts of climate change.<sup>2</sup> These children face a deadly combination of exposure to multiple climate related shocks and limited access to the services they need to build resilience, realize their

rights and reach their full potential. The United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that climate change has already led to irreversible shifts in global weather patterns and conditions.<sup>3</sup> Three-year-olds today will experience a childhood of extreme weather events spiralling out of control. From wildfires to floods, droughts and hurricanes, the impacts of climate change continue to intensify.<sup>4</sup>

## Climate risks for children



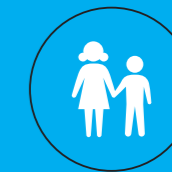
**820 million children** are highly exposed to heatwaves<sup>5</sup> and this number will likely increase as global average temperatures rise and weather patterns become more unpredictable.



**400 million children** live in areas that face high risks of cyclones and this will likely be exacerbated as cyclones grow in severity, weather patterns shift, and rainfall intensifies.<sup>6</sup>



**330 million children** are highly exposed to riverine flooding and an additional 240 million face a high risk of coastal flooding. As glaciers melt, and as sea levels rise, the risk will only become greater.<sup>7</sup>



**850 million** – approximately one-third of all children – are exposed to four or more climate stresses.<sup>8</sup> Climate and environmental hazards, shocks and stresses do not occur in isolation. Droughts, floods and severe weather, combined with other environmental stressors, compound one another.

### BOX 1: Definitions

**Climate mobility** encompasses all aspects of climate change-related migration and displacement, as well as planned relocation and evacuation.

**Displacement:** Displacement related to climate change is associated with involuntary movement. For many families, displacement is sudden in nature, short-term, and usually occurs internally or across a border to a neighbouring country.<sup>6</sup>

**Migration:** Migration related to climate change is a form of movement that implies at least some degree of choice in the decision to move, but there are questions surrounding the voluntary nature of any migration related to climate change.<sup>7</sup>

**Planned relocation:** A planned process in which persons or groups of persons move or are assisted to move away from their homes or places of temporary residence, are settled in a new location, and provided with the conditions for rebuilding their lives.<sup>8</sup>

**Children uprooted or children on the move:** International or internal child migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as internally displaced children or returnees.<sup>9</sup>

**Young people and ‘youth’:** While there is no single definition of “youth” or “young people”, this brief focuses on young people, aged 14 to 24, and uses the terms ‘young people’ and ‘youth’ interchangeably.



## Child mobility and climate change

Millions of children around the world are on the move, driven from their homes by the impacts of slow-onset disasters, environmental degradation and sudden-onset disasters exacerbated by climate change. Most climate mobility is internal. In fact, in 2020, disasters, including storms and flooding, triggered three times more internal displacements than violent conflicts.<sup>10</sup> There were over 9.8

million weather-related internal displacements of children – equivalent to more than 26,900 each day.<sup>11</sup> Hurricanes, like Eta and Iota in Central America, which caused flooding and mudslides, compounded by a surge in COVID-19 cases, have left the hardest-hit areas facing a large-scale humanitarian disaster, where for many children and young people, moving is their only option.<sup>12</sup>



Between 2014 and 2018, **761,000** children were internally displaced by storms and flooding across the Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – a six-fold increase compared to the **175,000** displaced between 2009 and 2013.<sup>13</sup>

Where the adverse impacts of climate change – such as water scarcity, crop failure, food insecurity, loss of land and economic shocks – create challenging environments for children and young people to live, learn and thrive, migration can be a strategy to cope. In Guatemala, for example, where communities have suffered years of drought, food insecurity is a significant factor in

migrants' decisions to leave.<sup>14</sup> For children living in Pacific Island states, extreme events interact with sea-level rise to create severe flooding. Countries like Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands are experiencing ocean floods that wash saltwater onto agricultural lands and contaminate drinking water sources, creating increasing pressure to adapt or move.<sup>15</sup>

**“The sea is swallowing villages, eating away at shorelines, withering crops. Relocation of people ... cries over loved ones, dying of hunger and thirst. It's catastrophic. It's sad ... but it's real.”<sup>16</sup>**

Timoci, 14-years-old, Fiji

Climate mobility and urbanization are closely interlinked. In Bangladesh, for example, internal migration towards urban centres has been a long-standing trend. As climatic events become more frequent and severe, increased salinity in

coastal areas drives families inland as their homes become uninhabitable.<sup>17</sup> In the city of Dhaka, it is estimated that 70 per cent of slum-dwellers have fled some sort of environmental shock.<sup>18</sup>

## Climate change, fragility and conflict

In some places, the changing climate is also aggravating risks of conflict and violence. Take the example of Chad in North Central Africa. The country's terrain forms a shallow basin rising from Lake Chad in the west and surrounded by mountains in the north, east, and south. The Chari and Logone rivers, which flow from the southeast into Lake Chad, provide the only source of natural irrigation.<sup>19</sup> Livelihoods are dependent on subsistence farming and livestock rearing, so access to water is essential. In Chad, many children are out of school and have limited access to healthcare and other services, leaving them vulnerable to hazards and shocks.<sup>20</sup>

Against this backdrop, the impacts of climate change are stark. A combination of droughts and over irrigation during the past 50 years, has caused 90 per cent of Lake Chad to dry up.<sup>21</sup> Increasing heat means lower crop yields and worse pastures, driving families and young people

from their homes in pursuit of more fertile land. As competition for access to Lake Chad and its precious resources has intensified, so too has conflict in the area, eroding social cohesion and fuelling further displacement.<sup>22</sup>

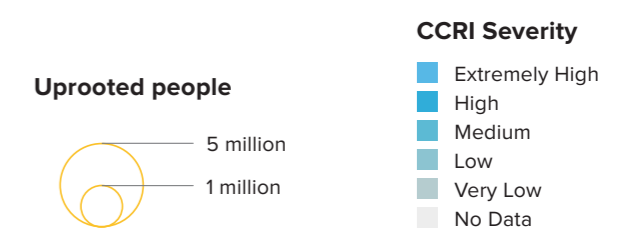
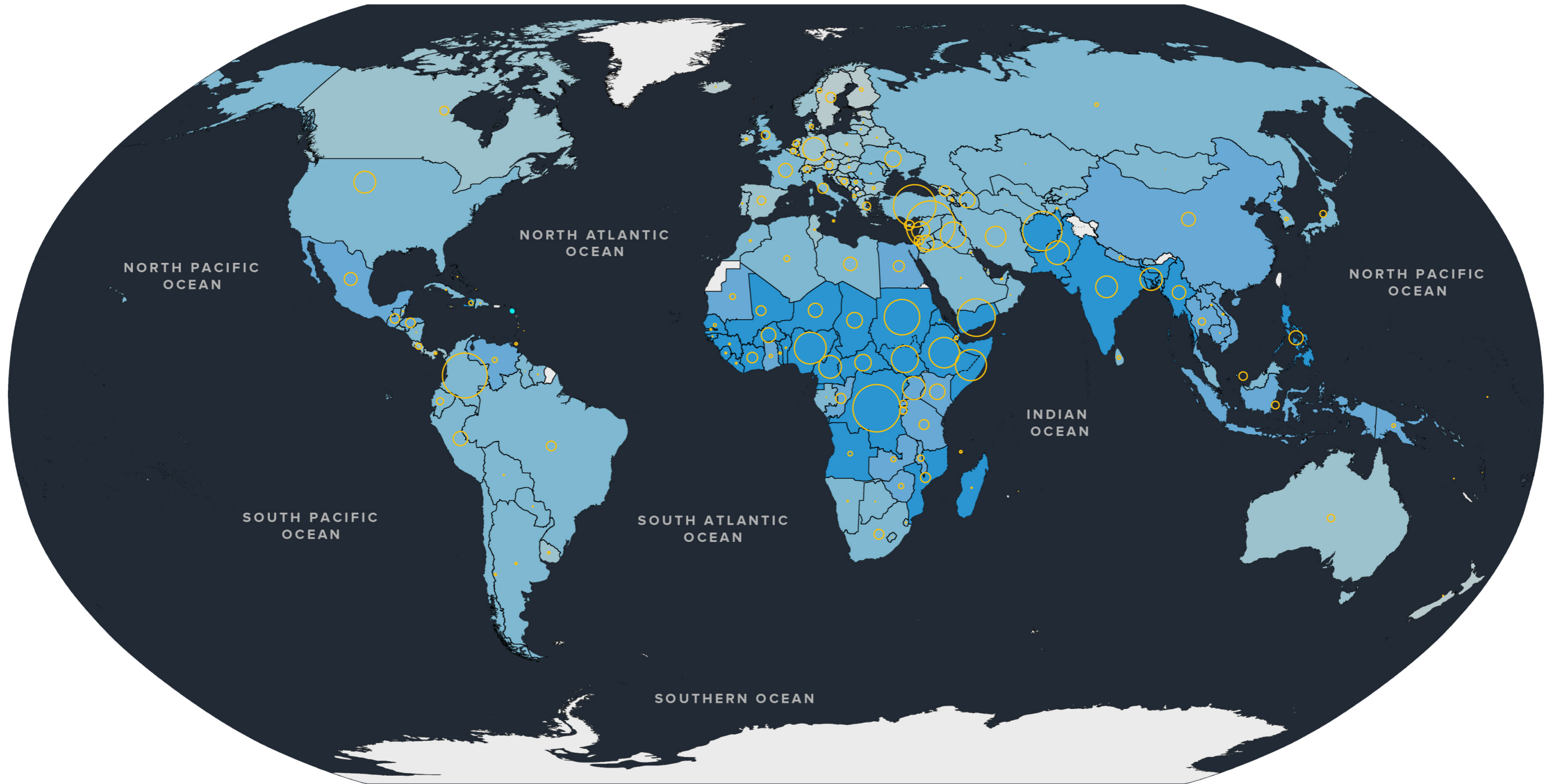
And Chad is not alone. Climate change is intensifying disputes over scarce resources, reducing economic opportunities, and straining public institutions and infrastructure across the globe. Almost all (29 out of 33) of the extremely high-risk countries according to the CCRI are also considered fragile contexts.<sup>23</sup> Further, 95 per cent of new conflict related displacements recorded worldwide in 2020, occurred in countries that are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.<sup>24</sup> And one quarter of countries with extremely high climate risk for children also have very high levels of displacement – with more than five per cent of the population displaced.<sup>25</sup>



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UN0267756/Fraizer  
Girls clean dishes in Lake Chad, Tagal village, Chad.



# Children's Climate Risk Index and Displaced Population (IDPs, refugees, asylum seekers)



Note: The total number of uprooted people is the sum of refugees and asylum-seekers (2020), returned refugees (2019), people internally displaced by conflict and violence (2019) and people internally displaced by disasters (2019). Data sources: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), UNICEF, 2021, The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis – Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index.



Conflict and fragility can also increase vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, as is the case in Afghanistan. Located at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, the country is landlocked and mountainous. Agriculture and farming are at the heart of people's livelihoods and about 70 per cent of Afghans live and work in rural areas.<sup>26</sup> The interplay of decades of conflict

and environmental degradation has eroded community resilience, as well as the capacity of institutions to cope with, anticipate and lower the risks related to climate change. Afghanistan is home to an estimated 2.9 million IDPs<sup>27</sup> and there are 1.4 million Afghan refugees in neighboring Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> It is ranked the least peaceful country in the State of Peace Index.<sup>29</sup>

### BOX 2: Badro's Story

In Afghanistan, the impacts of ongoing conflict and disasters have created a volatile situation, which has displaced many Afghans internally and left families struggling to cope. Badro's family were forced to flee their home when drought pushed them further into poverty and her father was unable to repay money he borrowed from relatives. Desperate and seeing no other solution, Badro's family arranged her engagement to a man 30 years her senior when she was five years old. Badro's story is not unique: A UNICEF study showed that a worsening security situation, increased poverty, violence and social norms put girls like Badro at risk, with as many as 42 per cent of households reporting at least one family member was married before the age of 18.<sup>30</sup>

In countries where climate risk, fragility and conflict intersect, and where high numbers of displacement already exists, we can reasonably

expect children and young people will need to adapt or move – and it is these countries where we need to focus our efforts to plan and prepare.



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UNI320909/Fazel  
 Hazrat Bilal Internally Displace People (IDP), Mazar-e-Sharif, North of Afghanistan, 15-April-2020  
 During COVID-19 most countries are experiencing lock down including Afghanistan. UNICEF Afghanistan is a front-line organization on the ground providing firsthand information and public raising awareness especially for vulnerable populations, such as internally displace persons in camps. An outbreak of a respiratory disease like COVID-19 could spread easily through the overcrowded confines and unsafe conditions typical of many camps or settlements. Families in these environments would be more likely to get sick and less capable of fighting off the disease because of inadequate services.

### BOX 3: An urgent need for more and better data and evidence

Children on the move in the context of climate change are often statistically invisible. Existing data on migrants, refugees and IDPs are usually derived from registers, censuses, administrative data and surveys. All too often, these data do not include information on age, sex, origin or travel situation – making it impossible to estimate global numbers of children uprooted, or to determine how climate change contributes to their decisions to move.

Comparable, reliable, timely, disaggregated and accessible data are essential for better understanding and addressing the needs of children and young people on the move. Greater efforts to collect credible qualitative and quantitative data will be critical to help us minimize risk and prepare for climate mobility. We need stronger evidence on the way climate interacts with other drivers, where children and young people who are most vulnerable live, the risks they face, and the contributions they make at their destination.

In addition to collecting better data, improving the way we use and share data we already have will be key. For example, we can unlock new insights from satellite, mobile phone and social media data, to help us identify populations at risk, strengthen their resilience and the adaptive capacities of the services they need to survive and thrive.



Photo credit: © UNICEF/ UN0377672/Billy  
 A young girl travels by boat to where her school used to be in the town of Campur in Guatemala. Hurricanes Eta and Iota, which struck Guatemala in November 2020, led to flooding and destroyed homes, displacing more than 310,000 people to shelters. The impact of the hurricanes and COVID-19 pandemic have led to an increase in malnutrition in Guatemala.



## Mobility as an adaptation strategy

Climate mobility – and how it affects or could save the lives of children – remains a hotly contested issue. Mobility in the context of climate change is commonly used to illustrate how climate change can act as a ‘threat multiplier’ and without additional context, the (unintended) consequence of this framing is that it presents climate mobility as a security risk. It obscures the role that migration can play as a proactive adaptation strategy, and the need and potential for interventions that prevent displacement and allow people to decide whether or not to move.

Climate mobility is not always sudden and forced, and is often driven by an interplay of aspirations, socio-economic and climate-related factors. Decisions to move usually happen in a context of constrained life choices faced by young people caught between their aspirations and hopes, a duty of care to their families and communities, and pressures to leave home. While figures and the interplay between drivers, aspirations and options remain uncertain – a fact that unfortunately fuels more scaremongering than meaningful policy debate – one thing is clear: even with major progress to mitigate the impacts of climate change, migration will continue to be an adaptation strategy for many children and young people.

Although data is limited, **existing evidence suggests young people are the most likely to move in response to climate related shocks.**<sup>31</sup> The inclination to migrate tends to be highest among young people in general<sup>32</sup> and they are often over represented in contexts of migration and displacement.<sup>33</sup> Available data on the social

profile of shock-related migration is generally mixed, with different studies finding women, low incomes, limited formal education and agricultural occupations to be associated variously with higher or lower levels of mobility, but being young has been found to consistently increase the likelihood of migration.<sup>34</sup> Young people are more likely to move in response to flooding, storms, short-term weather fluctuations, and long-term precipitation changes than their adult counterparts.<sup>35</sup> This means ensuring policy and programming responses consider the specific mobility risks, barriers and opportunities for children and young people is essential.

For many young people, migration can provide opportunities to pursue aspirations, diversify their skills and contribute at their destinations. In the context of the urgent low-carbon transition that industrialized economies must undertake, there will be significant skills and workforce gaps that migration of young workers, between cities or countries, can help fill. Further, supporting to upskill young migrants to fill jobs of the future focused on sustainability, can help us move towards a low carbon economy.<sup>36</sup> And this is a priority felt by young people themselves. An analysis of 21 UNICEF U-Report polls representing 270,727 youth voices, showed the biggest challenges for young people in supporting a transition to an economy that protects the environment are lack of resources (47%), lack of knowledge and skills (30%), and the lack of green jobs available (15%).<sup>37</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed by young people on the move in a recent poll, where nearly 40 per cent identified education and training as their biggest priorities.<sup>38</sup>

### BOX 4: Promising practice: Global Skills Partnership

Recognizing that climate change and other forces will create vast pressures for greater migration in the region in future, **the Australia-Pacific Training Coalition (APTC)**, a network of five technical training centers across the South Pacific, including in low-income countries like Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, was created in 2007. It has trained about 12,000 young people in vocational subjects like hospitality, construction, and automobile maintenance. It grants qualifications recognized uniformly across the region and focuses on skills that are needed both in origin and destination countries.<sup>39</sup>

**Currently, for those most at risk of the impacts of climate change, there are few options to move safely and regularly across borders.**

While the majority of climate mobility is internal, migration laws in most countries are not conducive to receiving, providing protection, or realizing the rights of environmental migrants.<sup>40</sup> Most people uprooted by the impacts of climate change will be unlikely to meet legal definitions or other conditions for employment-based, family or humanitarian admissions to destination countries, leaving many children and young people stranded with nowhere to go.

The 1951 Refugee Convention is likely to protect only a small number of people displaced across borders in the context of climate change. To qualify, people must satisfy the refugee definition (that is, they must have a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group).<sup>41</sup> But as UNHCR has noted, the impacts of climate change must be understood within a broader socio-political context, and disasters might exacerbate existing persecution, discrimination or marginalization, proving a refugee claim. Further, in Africa and the Americas, people may qualify for refugee status under the broader regional refugee definitions, where climate impacts could constitute events ‘seriously disturbing public order’, giving rise to protection.<sup>42</sup>

Migration policies have also become more restrictive in recent years, requiring compliance with a host of bureaucratic procedures. Labour migration pathways or scholarship opportunities are often out of reach for children and young people in areas worst affected by climate change. Employment visas are hard to come by, and migrant workers are often unable to move with their families, so children get left behind. Those who migrate without documentation often end up in the informal workforce, where they risk exploitation at the hands of their employers.<sup>43</sup> This is not only to the detriment of young migrants, but also to societies everywhere looking to attract and foster new talent, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Ensuring migration is a safe and empowering option for children and young people impacted by climate change, will mean expanding opportunities for children and young people to move – within and across borders – before they become displaced. Ensuring children can migrate with their families, including as part of labour migration schemes, and supporting more young migrants to legally pursue education and employment in another part of the country or abroad, will be critical. Further, exploring innovative skills and training schemes for young people between places of origin and destination, with a focus on upskilling for jobs of the future could help young people reach their full potential to the benefit of” with full potential and benefit of communities and countries.



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UN0207002/Herwig Ikhlas, 18, taking part in a fashion design workshop in Za'atari Refugee Camp, at Start-Up Za'atari, an event hosted by UNICEF and The One Foundation. Her group designed a dress, incorporating a cape with feathers to represent freedom and women's empowerment. The first ever 'Start-Up Za'atari' event on 2-3 May 2018, held by The One Foundation and UNICEF to showcase and unleash the talent and potential of young people in Za'atari Refugee Camp, with social innovation exhibitions and workshops.



## Being uprooted in a changing climate – compounding vulnerabilities

The climate is changing everywhere and children in rich and poor countries are – and will continue to be – affected. But migrant and displaced children and young people – whether living in protracted displacement, refugee camps, urban slums or booming mega cities – are among those most exposed to its impacts, with the least resources to cope. Already at a disadvantage, children on the move often face barriers to attending school, accessing healthcare, child protection and other services that help build their resilience. They are often pushed to the edge of society, where they live in areas where the risk of climate hazards, shocks and stresses is the greatest. These factors combined make them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

School can provide a safe and supportive environment for children and help them develop a sense of belonging, critical to building their capacity to bounce back from adversity. Schools are also important entry points for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and sharing information on climate risks and adaptation. Yet, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than their host community peers,<sup>44</sup> and many migrant children are excluded from education based on their citizenship, migration or legal status. Similarly, exclusion from health care services is common for children and young people on the move. Only eight EU Member States grant all undocumented migrant children the same level of health care as the children of its own citizens – six restrict their entitlements to emergency care only and 11 allow undocumented migrants limited access to specialist services.<sup>45</sup> And the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the situation worse as migrant and displaced populations are excluded from COVID-19 vaccine rollouts<sup>46</sup> and face additional barriers to access services.

Making systems resilient and robust, and ensuring they are inclusive of all, regardless of status, is essential to reduce the vulnerability of uprooted children and young people to the impacts of climate change. In practice, this means ensuring schools, healthcare facilities and other services are prohibited from disclosing personal information to immigration authorities, so migrant and displaced

children can access these services without fear of being detected, detained or deported.

Many families affected by climate mobility settle in informal settlements and squats where they live in overcrowded conditions with poor ventilation and limited access to water and sanitation facilities. Often informal settlements and poorer urban neighbourhoods are situated in areas with high vulnerability to climate change, such as low-lying plains, coastal zones, unstable slopes, and drylands.<sup>47</sup> In these contexts, families may be exposed to ongoing climate hazards, including flooding, water shortages, sea-level rise, and extreme weather events, in settings with poor infrastructure to protect them.<sup>48</sup>

Bihar, one of the most disaster-prone states in India, is an example of where these vulnerabilities collide. Recurring disasters in rural areas have led to a decline in agricultural production pushing many farming communities to secondary cities.<sup>49</sup> These families are often forced to reside in informal settlements built on the outskirts of the city, where they have inadequate access to water and sanitation facilities and are highly exposed to floods and storms. In the city of Patna alone, there are over 13,000 households, including more than 11,000 children living in poor urban neighbourhoods.<sup>50</sup> For these children, the impacts of climate change loom large and threaten their survival and wellbeing.

On top of exclusion from services and discrimination, children and young people on the move risk being left out of efforts to adapt and prepare for climate change. When hazards strike, migrant and displaced children face specific challenges, protection risks and barriers that need to be addressed in national and local policies and plans. For example, early-warnings may not be in languages they understand or shared through communication channels migrant and displaced communities can access, or children may have become separated from their families during mobility. Ensuing DRR and resilience building efforts are inclusive of migrant and displaced children and young people, is critical for reducing their vulnerabilities and supporting them to adapt.

### BOX 5: Spotlight on Rohingya in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world and experiences annual monsoon and cyclone seasons.<sup>51</sup> The country is also host to more than 895,000 Rohingya refugees,<sup>52</sup> most of whom live in camps in the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Site in Cox's Bazar district.<sup>53</sup> Topography and living conditions mean the impact of the annual monsoon rains has devastating consequences for Rohingya refugees: the camps are in areas prone to landslides and flooding, houses are often build closely together and commonly made of bamboo, rope and tarpaulins.<sup>54</sup> In July 2021, in one week alone, flooding and landslides forced at least 24,000 refugees to abandon their shelters.<sup>55</sup>

The government's focus on repatriation has created challenges for longer-term planning to increase the resilience of Rohingya refugees<sup>56</sup> and ensure they have access to services. Only three per cent of young people aged between 15-24 are receiving any form of education.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, a young refugee from Cox's Bazar underlines that youth are eager to engage in community development:

"Hence, we work in various positive ways to bring back peace and secured future to our youth and children in the refugee camp. We want our youths and children to be surrounded by books, not by violence."



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UN0336422/Sujan  
On 14 July 2019, Sadek, 10, at Camp 8 of the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Site, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The area behind him is flooded due to rain. The Learning Centre (red) sits behind him, nearly inundated with water. Sadek studies at the Learning Centre as well as at a Madras (religious school). He lives with his parents and seven siblings in a small house, which was affected by a recent landslide. His father finds work as a day labourer. As of July 2019, Kutupalong-Balukhali was temporary home to more than 600,000 stateless Rohingya refugees, making it the largest single host site for Rohingya in Bangladesh.  
As reported 18 July 2019, heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides across three countries in South Asia – Nepal, India, and Bangladesh – have killed at least 93 children, and put the lives of millions more at risk. UNICEF estimates that more than 12 million people, including about five million children, have been affected. In Bangladesh, monsoon rains continue to affect most of the country – particularly the central-northern and south-east regions. More than two million people have been affected by flooding, including around 700,510 children. Cox's Bazar in the south-east of the country – home to more than a million Rohingya refugees – has been hit by excessive rain this month. According to the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ICSG), 7,796 Rohingya refugees were affected by 122 weather-related incidents in June; close to 50,000 refugees have been affected since the beginning of May. UNICEF is working closely with partners to provide essential WASH, health, nutrition, education and child protection services to the affected population.



**Children uprooted are not a uniform homogenous group.** Some children, including girls, children with disabilities, and indigenous children, experience compounding vulnerabilities that can leave them increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As we prepare and work to build resilience of communities to reduce climate risks, care must be given to the unique needs of these children to ensure our efforts are truly inclusive.

The experiences, adaptive capacities, and vulnerabilities of uprooted girls and boys can differ greatly. For example, women and girls in disaster-prone communities often contribute to climate-sensitive work, such as agricultural production,

that meets essential household needs but is not directly linked to control over resources. This means disasters can uniquely compromise women's and girls' agency and their ability to feed themselves or their families, heightening their vulnerabilities to risky livelihoods, sexual exploitation, or child marriage.<sup>58</sup> Further, gender roles and relations significantly affect girls' and boys' decisions and abilities to migrate for environmental reasons, their specific vulnerabilities, as well as their experiences of migration.

Children and young people from indigenous and pastoralist communities are also disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, despite their minimal ecological footprint.

*“The land protects our culture and beliefs. Sometimes I just think, wow, this is the very very place my ancestors stood. But every year the waves are eating away at our land, so we have less guarantee to live on.”<sup>59</sup>*

Takjab, 13 years old, Marshall Islands



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UNI341606/Pocaterra  
Fidelina, 12, from the Hoti ethnic group, smiles at the camera in San José de Kayamá, Venezuela, on February 23, 2020.

Often with strong material and spiritual reliance on their lands, indigenous and pastoralist communities depend on the environment and its resources for their livelihoods. Culture, rituals and medical practices are closely tied to nature and risk being disrupted by the changing climate. Further, indigenous communities often live in areas that are highly exposed to environmental degradation, like small islands barely above sea level, tropical forests threatened by deforestation or polar regions affected by global warming.<sup>60</sup> Indigenous children and young people on the move can

experience intersectional discrimination – as migrants and members of indigenous groups.

But at the same time, young people from Indigenous and pastoralist communities have a deep knowledge of their environment and understanding of appropriate prevention and adaptation measures to climate change. Young Indigenous activists, like Amelia Telford, a young Aboriginal and South Sea Islander woman from Bundjalung country in Australia, are leading efforts to protect their land, culture and communities from the impacts of climate change.

### BOX 6

Amelia Telford is the National Director of the Seed Indigenous Youth Climate Network. Amelia is passionate about supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to protect their land, culture and communities from the impacts of climate change and fossil fuel extraction and create positive change for her people. Amelia was awarded National NAIDOC Youth of the Year in 2014, Bob Brown's Young Environmentalist for the Year in 2015 and Australian Geographic Young Conservationist of the Year 2015 for her commitment to building a more just and sustainable future for all young people.<sup>61</sup>



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UNI308044/Scherbrucker  
Two women walk home through a dry riverbed Gwembe Valley, Zambia 27 January 2020.



## Children and young people as agents for change

### BOX 7: Voices of Youth: Tahsin Uddin, Bangladesh

*“A large part of the population is young, and since the future of Bangladesh is in the hands of these young people, it is important for us to be aware of climate change and take action. I am determined to work on this tirelessly, though it isn’t an easy task.”*

*“The role of youth is most important for the present and future world. You have to come forward now to protect the climate. I would say to all young people, start taking action from your place right now. It’s our time!”*

*“As a little boy, I used to visit my grandfather’s home in a rural setting near a river. I felt that the river had been expanding day by day. My little mind started to know how the people of the river erosion areas are surviving due to the impact of climate change. Then one day I read an article in a newspaper about the harmful aspects of climate change. This made me worried. [...] Now I am creating opportunities for others, especially children at risk from the impacts of climate change in coastal areas, to practice journalism. In this way, they are able to present their situation directly to the world. Many of them are grown up and are interested to work in the mainstream media.”<sup>62</sup>*



Above all, uprooted children and young people have insights to offer, experiences to share and huge potential to help shape better solutions that work for them and their communities.

An unprecedented groundswell of youth activism has raised public consciousness to new levels and is pushing political leaders to develop bold and ambitious ideas to confront the challenges associated with climate change. For example, the Supreme Court of Colombia ruled in favour of 25 children and young people who successfully argued the government had failed to reduce deforestation in the Amazon despite its national and international obligations.<sup>63</sup> And in the Pacific islands, a group of students campaigned for the International Court of Justice, the UN’s top legal advisor, to advise on the intergenerational responsibilities of governments for the impacts of climate change, garnering support from the Prime Minister of Vanuatu.<sup>64</sup> A UNICEF U-Report poll conducted in 17 countries in early 2021, capturing the voices of 214,233 young people,

found 76 per cent believe they have a responsibility to tackle climate change and want to take action.<sup>65</sup>

**Children and young people uprooted in the context of climate change bear the brunt of its impacts, but they can also be key agents for change.** They are at the forefront of adapting, developing resilience strategies and living with the impacts of climate change – and have critical skills, experience and ideas needed by societies everywhere. Young people on the move can play a key role in addressing climate-related risks by exercising their views, opinions and concerns, identifying and working on solutions, and promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles – setting an example for their peers and communities. Young people on the move can help conduct needs assessments in their neighbourhoods or camps, develop alternative livelihoods or agricultural practices to ease migration pressures, and collect and ‘truth test’ data in their communities.

### BOX 8: Promising practice: Green Yoma (Youth Agency Market Place)

Yoma is a digital marketplace for youth across the world to build and transform their futures by providing opportunities for them to engage in social impact tasks and learning and earning opportunities. Yoma aims to identify, nurture and connect hidden talents, including among populations on the move, using psychometric tools and dynamic experiential learning, allowing for individualized growth journeys. Yoma provides critical opportunities for youth on the move to help foster their talents, skills and potential.

Green Yoma focuses specifically the challenges of climate change and youth unemployment by building a green skilling-to-earning pathway to address the needs of a growing green economy and supporting young people to collect real time data to verify its impact.<sup>66</sup>

Yet young people on the move, particularly the most vulnerable, are largely absent from political debates and decision making on climate change. They often lack the means to stage sit-ins or protests because their political voice and opportunity to speak out was never there in the first place. Too often their voices remain unheard, and their potential overlooked. Failure

to meaningfully engage the most vulnerable uprooted young people and think through how climate, mobility and childhood interact, is already having devastating consequences. Successfully addressing the challenges of climate change, will mean putting those most affected – those who are living with its impacts every day – in the driver’s seat.



**BOX 9: Voices of Youth: Nkosi Nyathi, Zimbabwe**

*“What keeps me on the frontline for climate justice is the notion that I don’t only represent my nation but my entire generation because climate justice concerns our future. We don’t need torture. We deserve to live happily as well, but to attain that healthy, happy living we will not stop speaking out for what we want and what we deserve, to bring about a child-safe and sustainable future.”*

*“I have dedicated my voice as a voice of the voiceless, to call for immediate action and there is no better time for acting than now.”*

*“If I was given just two minutes to reimagine a better future, I would imagine a world where every child is included in crucial decision making. I would reimagine a world where every household uses clean energy.”*

*“Someone must do something and that someone is none other than you, I have started the change I want, you can also do something to save the future and there is no better time for doing that than now.”<sup>67</sup>*



Photo credit: © UNICEF/2020/Aaron Utumeli

**Youth activism must be met with political leadership** to take the necessary regulatory, financial and practical steps to tackle the worst impacts of climate change – and address the challenges and leverage the opportunities of climate mobility. To translate commitments already made under the [Paris Agreement](#), the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\) Task](#)

[Force on Displacement](#), the [Sendai Framework](#), the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) and the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) into concrete action, the global community needs to do more than respond to the climate crisis as it unfolds. Shifting our focus to preparation and adaptation with and for children and young people – especially the most vulnerable – will be key to our success.

**Taking action – with and for young people uprooted**

The long-term solution to the climate crisis is a reduction of emissions to safe levels – reaching net-zero by 2050 to stay on course for warming that does not exceed 1.5°C. This alone could reduce additional lifetime exposure of new-borns to heatwaves by 45 per cent, 39 per cent for droughts, and 38 per cent for floods.<sup>68</sup> However, climate dynamics are such that mitigation efforts will take decades to reverse the impacts of climate change, and for the children of today, this will be too late.

Practically speaking, this that means over the next decade, in addition to reducing emissions, we need to prioritize action and investment in resilience

building and adaptation. It means ensuring migration is safe and empowering and that children and young people are in the best possible position to integrate and thrive in their host communities, as well as reintegrate upon return.

Whether or not this will be the case will depend on choices we make today and in the coming years. Policy choices. And investment choices. The window to prepare for the impacts of climate change is closing quickly, but prioritizing the urgent actions below – developed with and for young people – could lead to better outcomes for children, their communities and countries – now and in the years to come.

**1****Prevent and minimize the risk of displacement in the context of climate change**

- **Take ambitious action to reduce global emissions and pollution to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.** This means reducing emissions to limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial level, as called for by the Paris Agreement
- **Ensure preparedness, DRR and efforts to build resilience are inclusive of children on the move and those at risk of climate related displacement.** Provide age- and gender-appropriate and context specific information on risks, climate change adaptation and measures to strengthen resilience, in a language migrant and displaced children understand and via communication channels they can access.
- **Invest in innovative data sources to collect more and better data on children affected by climate mobility.** Where possible, data should be disaggregated by age, sex, disability, location, migration status, household income and other key social and demographic variables. Better data and research are essential to reduce risks and prepare.

In rural **Pakistan**, satellite imagery and survey data are combined to forecast migration patterns due to climate change. The results have helped better understand the relationship between weather and long-term migration movements. For instance, flooding – a climate shock with large humanitarian relief efforts – was found to have modest to insignificant impacts on migration, while heat stress consistently increases long-term migration due to its impact on agriculture.<sup>69</sup>

Together with **Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG)**, UNICEF has worked with children and youth to map out areas in their community that are most vulnerable to waterlogging. Based on the community’s records, coupled with scientific data, GIS maps were generated to demonstrate areas susceptible to waterlogging and the likely duration of waterlogging events under three different rainfall scenarios. Collecting this data is critical to informing both health and education planning, as waterlogging can inundate schools and contribute to negative health outcomes.<sup>70</sup>

In **Peru**, IOM is working with local governments to include migrants in response plans and strengthen capacities in disaster-risk-prone areas. This initiative is focused on improving social protection and economic integration of the Venezuelan migrants and their host communities.<sup>71</sup>

**Cities in South Africa, India, Mexico and Bangladesh<sup>72</sup>** are using Satellite Earth Observation (SAT EO) Data, together with Artificial Intelligence (AI), to provide policy makers with valuable information to minimize the risks associated with displacement and urbanization due to climate change. Using this information, they can assess the vegetation, temperature, available water and land use before and after a disaster and can map the damage caused by severe weather. This is helping them to predict mobility towards cities. To attract skilled talent to these cities and to support this work into the future, the Talent Cities initiative is working to up-skill young migrant and displaced people.<sup>73</sup>



## 2

## Strengthen inclusive services and systems for children and young people who move and take measures to keep essential services running after disaster strikes

- **Ensure sector strategies, budgets, infrastructure and capacity development include climate resilience and mobility as core elements.** Keeping health, education, child protection and water and sanitation services running without disruption is critical. Schooling and services for internally displaced children should be prioritized at the earliest stages of an emergency.
- **Provide uprooted girls and boys with inclusive access to services, including education, healthcare, child protection and water and sanitation, regardless of status.** Remove legal, administrative or financial barriers preventing internally displaced children accessing services. This may involve removing registration requirements or service costs. Ensure firewalls are in place between immigration authorities and service providers so undocumented migrant children can access services without fear of being detected, detained or deported. A child's legal or displacement status should never be a barrier to accessing basic services.
- **Work across borders and sectors to strengthen service systems.** Climate scientists, migration experts, policymakers, donors, young people, and child rights specialists should come together to share research, evidence and best practice examples, to find ways to strengthen systems in the context of climate mobility.

In **Yemen**, where 11.3 million children need humanitarian assistance, regular destructive cyclones have exacerbated humanitarian challenges. In October 2018, Cyclone Luban displaced thousands of people, many of whom settled in crowded displacement camps where they are vulnerable to disease. In response, UNICEF rapidly deployed two mobile clinics in areas with high concentration of displaced families, to provide children and families with integrated health and nutrition services.<sup>74</sup>

**UNICEF's Learning Passport**, powered by Microsoft, is a digital learning platform offering online, mobile, and offline learning opportunities for children. The platform hosts learning materials, offers support for teachers, and tracks children's educational progress,

aiming to improve access to quality education for all children before, during and after mobility. Originally designed for education in emergencies, the Learning Passport was adapted and scaled up rapidly to support learners affected by school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Learning Passport is currently available in 13 countries.<sup>75</sup>

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the National Office for Disaster Services in **Antigua and Barbuda** run contingency plan coaching sessions for teachers in schools across the islands. In these sessions, teachers learn to conduct hazard and risk assessments to help develop school contingency plans by mapping vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change and capacities to respond.<sup>76</sup>



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UN0535824/Dejongh  
Children learning and playing in a transit center, in Agadez, in the North of Niger.

## 3

## Prepare for climate mobility and ensure safe migration is an option for children and families affected by climate change, before they become displaced

- **Expand safe and legal pathways for children and families impacted by climate change to move – within and across borders.** Increase options for children to migrate with their families, including as part of labour migration schemes, and support young migrants to legally pursue education and employment in another part of the country or abroad.
- **Explore innovative skills and training schemes for young people between places of origin and destination, with a focus on upskilling for jobs of the future.** Investing in skills and training in origin countries or cities can benefit both the domestic workforce and migrant workforce. Not all trainees will migrate, and those who remain can contribute to their local community with more advanced skills, capacity, and teaching potential. At the same time, the destination country can be directly involved in shaping the skillsets of future migrants, while making strategic investments in establishing training facilities and programmes in the country of origin.

**Australia's** Seasonal Worker Programme has provided more than 33,000 jobs to Pacific and Timorese peoples to work in Australia's horticulture industry. In **Tonga**, the scheme is now more important than aid and trade combined and has been found to other positive benefits. For example, research has shown that the children of seasonal workers are 10–14 per cent more likely to attend school than other Tongan children.<sup>77</sup>

The **Government of Nigeria** is partnering with the World Bank to better understand how labour migration and skills partnerships can provide more

and better jobs to Nigerian youth. One objective of this collaboration is to assess the feasibility of new bilateral labour agreements in chosen sectors, to develop a Global Skills Partnership with Germany.<sup>78</sup>

**Fiji** enacted the Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund Act in 2019. The purpose of the Trust Fund is to fund and support the planned relocation of communities in Fiji that are severely affected by climate change, and ensure that there is a clear funding system in place that can be used to assist communities in Fiji when relocation becomes necessary.<sup>79</sup>



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UNI331584/Mohiruddin  
Volunteers of the UNICEF-supported Cyclone Preparedness Programme distribute warnings to the public before Cyclone Amphan hits the southern coastal zone of Bangladesh, in Shyamnagar Upazila in Munshiganj District in Central Bangladesh on 20 May 2020.



## 4

## Partner with young people uprooted

- **Learn from and work with children and young people uprooted.** Tackling climate change to reduce the risks of displacement and foster the potential of current and future climate migrants means listening to and learning from young people on the move – not taking their space, but amplifying their voices and supporting to translate their asks into concrete action.
- **Give children and young people on the move a seat at the table in climate change processes at all levels, with specific efforts to engage the most vulnerable.** This means involving uprooted young people in global, national and local policy and planning on climate mitigation and adaptation, including in the development of National Action Plans (NAPs).

With support from UNICEF, **Guatemala** is working in partnership with Paz Joven, a youth organization, to strengthen adolescent and youth participation in resilience efforts. Young people were trained on advocacy and climate change, allowing them to engage in interviews and awareness-raising in their community. Young people are also advocating for the inclusion of mitigation and adaptation in municipal plans.<sup>80</sup>

**Freetown's** population will double over the next decade due to urban migration. In response, the Waste Management Micro-Enterprise Program was developed to promote improved economic livelihoods, sanitation and environmental resilience by working with migrant youth to strengthen and improve waste collection services in informal settlements. Since its launch, the city has extended its waste collection service from 8,000 households to 30,000 households.<sup>81</sup>

In **Eastern and Southern Africa**, UNICEF and the Scouts Movement are using the Cartedo digital platform to co-design and launch a regional challenge for young people to actively develop solutions to reduce plastic waste at the local level. The best three ideas will receive seed funding for a 3-month pilot in their respective communities, which will then be reviewed for potential scale-up. The partnership also focuses on expanding young people's access to reliable climate change information.<sup>82</sup>

In **Senegal**, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is working with returning migrants and host community youth on climate change adaptation. They are focusing on sustainable farming, planting crops that grow in the natural environment and building coastal resilience.<sup>83</sup>



Photo credit: © UNICEF/UNI207019/Chalasan  
On 20 September 2019 in New York City, youth climate activists join in a demonstration calling for global action to combat climate change. Organizers estimated that 250,000 took to the streets in New York; similar actions took place worldwide, with millions turning out in over 150 locations worldwide.

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Nina Py Brozovich, a college student and environmental activist who founded Fridays for future in Bolivia.





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