

Climate
Training

For key
concepts and
terms please
refer to Fact
Sheets 1, 2 & 3

Key messages:

- ▶ Children are especially vulnerable to the impacts of displacement from climate-related disasters and require special assistance and protection measures to ensure their health and safety.
- ▶ Children are also more vulnerable to becoming displaced as a result of the longer-term adverse impacts of climate change.
- ▶ There is a need to strengthen legal frameworks at the national and international level to ensure greater protection for children displaced as a result of climate change.
- ▶ Children's voices should be heard and they should be empowered to actively participate in activities and decision-making processes affecting their lives.

Displaced children are among the most vulnerable population groups in the world. Children who are displaced are at greater risk of experiencing violence, abuse, long lasting health and psychological impacts, reduced access to healthcare, increased barriers to accessing an education and a general deprivation of basic needs. Children are also at risk from the long-term impacts of climate change, including the increased risk of becoming displaced in future.

Source: UNICEF (2017). [No Place To Call Home—Protecting Children's Rights When The Changing Climate Forces Them To Flee](#)

Definitions

A **child** refers to a 'human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.'



Child protection refers to the 'prevention of, and response to, abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children.'

Unaccompanied children 'are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.'

Children on the move refers to 'those children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement, while it may open up opportunities, might also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence.'

Separated children 'are children separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.'

Sources: IFRC (2018). [Climate-Smart Disaster Risk Reduction Mapping](#); IFRC (2017). [Protection and Assistance for Children on the Move](#)

Climate-related displacement and children

How does climate-related displacement impact children?

Children in poverty are at greater risk from climate-related disasters: Poor women and children are more likely to be killed by a climate-induced disaster, such as storms and floods than men. Many early warning and disaster information systems are designed with little consideration for the specific needs of children, making it harder for children to access accurate information and resources, increasing their vulnerability and risk in disaster settings.

See: CARE, 2020. [Evicted By Climate Change](#)

Many countries facing the most significant impacts of climate change have a disproportionately large population of children and young people. This results in larger numbers of children living in risk-prone areas. For example, in many Pacific Island countries half the population is below the age of 23 and are already facing risks such as increased disease and lack of access to healthcare. Such risks are likely to be exacerbated by climate change due to its impact on access to resources like food and water.

See: Wilson, Catherine. 2020. [“Demanding The Future: Navigating The Pacific’s Youth Bulge.”](#) Lowy Institute.

Displacement of children from climate change and related disasters is under-estimated:

Climate events such as weather-related disasters are considered to be a significant cause of children becoming displaced. Furthermore, the numbers of children displaced by gradual climate changes, such as desertification or coastal erosion, are estimated to be many times higher, but this is not yet captured in global data.

See: UNICEF (2017). [No Place To Call Home — Protecting Children’s Rights When The Changing Climate Forces Them To Flee](#)

Facts and figures

An analysis of existing data collated by UNICEF in 2019 found that:

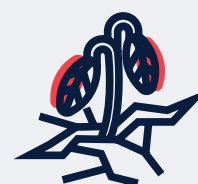
Around **503 million children** now live in areas at **extremely high risk of floods due to extreme weather events** such as cyclones, hurricanes and storms, as well as rising sea levels.



The number of **children displaced by extreme weather events** in the Caribbean has **increased six-fold in the past five years**. From 2014 to 2018, **761,000 children were internally displaced**, up from 175,000 children displaced between 2009 and 2013.



Around **160 million children** live in areas experiencing **high levels of drought**—and **by 2040, 1 in 4 children will live in areas of extreme water stress**.



Weather-related disasters increase the risk for girls to drop out of school and be **forced into marriages, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse**.



Source: [UNICEF Fact Sheet: ‘The climate crisis is a child rights crisis’](#) (Press Release, 6 December 2019)
Image: Matthew Carter/IFRC



How does climate-related displacement affect children?

There are many other factors that increase the vulnerability of children when experiencing displacement, including situations relating to climate change.

Psychological health: The psychological health of children is influenced by age, pre-existing conditions, social, physical and cognitive capabilities, as well as the mental health of parents or guardians. During times of displacement or disaster, children can suffer from intense stress, fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, loss of cultural connection and isolation. While children are capable of great resilience, these impacts can have long-term consequences even when the experience itself is brief. Trauma can be greatly exacerbated when children are separated from family members, making family reunification, counselling and community support an essential part of recovery.

Violence and abuse: Children on the move or in displacement settings, particularly those who have been separated from their families, are at much greater risk of experiencing violence, abuse, exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence. Unaccompanied children are among the most at risk, being targeted by traffickers or from people exploiting moments of crisis. The long-term impacts of this includes disrupted education, and reduced health and wellbeing over their lifetime. Girls are in particular danger of experiencing violence, rape, sexual exploitation and even death during times of displacement, and may be forced into early marriage or to engage in transactional sexual relationships in exchange for food and items necessary for survival. Emergency evacuation centres, camps and other communal facilities may not provide adequate safety and facilities for children and the usual law and order mechanisms may not be available during times of disaster.

Physical health: As for all displaced people in the event of a sudden-onset disaster, such as floods and cyclones, children are at risk of physical injury, and may have limited access to food, water and health facilities. They may end up living in slums, temporary settlements or overcrowded camps and suffer from a lack

of access to assistance and health service networks. Children who have become displaced across borders or in new communities may lack necessary health information due to language barriers or may deliberately avoid public or health authorities due to fear for themselves and/or their family's removal. During slow-onset events, such as increased sea levels or coastal erosion, the negative impacts of children may build incrementally as their development and livelihood opportunities become increasingly restricted.

Education: Displaced children, or those in transit, can face serious disruption to quality education. If children are in transit, they often have no access to educational facilities at all. Globally, only 50% of refugee children are enrolled in primary school. In refugee camps or migrant settlements, educational facilities or schools are often of poor quality and are commonly used as makeshift shelters in disasters. Post disaster, children often seek to engage in the labour force rather than return to their education as a means to survive.

Some examples of IFRC and National Society action to assist and protect displaced children:

- ▶ Emergency health care
- ▶ Safe spaces like child-friendly spaces and homes dedicated to unaccompanied minors
- ▶ Reception and transit centres
- ▶ Psychosocial care
- ▶ Support to access education, food, shelter, and legal counsel, and
- ▶ Engagement with governments and other stakeholders

Source: IFRC (2017). [Protection and Assistance for Children on the Move](#)

Protecting children from climate-related displacement



Play therapy in Indonesia

The Indonesian Red Cross Society ('PMI') supported approximately 100,000 evacuees who had fled an impending volcanic eruption with health and psychosocial support (PSS). The PSS was adapted to suit children and was provided in the form of 'play therapy.' A book donation programme enabled the collection of children's books to encourage their engagement and learning. These activities were also supplemented with close monitoring of protection issues, through the development of a checklist to help identify and address any issues and the deployment of Protection, Gender and Inclusion expert to ensure protection was mainstreamed throughout the entire response.

Source: IFRC (2018). [Climate-Smart Disaster Risk Reduction Mapping](#)

Image: Kathy Mueller/IFRC



Wake up Elmo!

Supporting displaced children in Fiji

Fiji Red Cross Society has been supporting children cope with the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Winston, including through school visits from some familiar faces, the famous puppets Elmo and Grover. As well as delivering important safety messages, Elmo offers reassurance and encourages the children to embrace their joy one again. "Do something that makes you happy—play with your friends, help your family, draw or dance—Elmo loves to dance!"

Source: IFRC (2016). [Elmo and Grover help Fijian children forget about Tropical Cyclone Winston](#)

Image: Corinne Ambler/IFRC

Legal frameworks protecting children

International legal protection

The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) provides the overarching international legal framework for the protection of children, setting out the rights that apply to children and young people under the age of 18.

These rights are further reinforced in other treaties and soft law instruments which are specific to situations of **displacement, climate change** and **disasters**. These include:

- The [Paris Agreement](#) 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."

Legal frameworks for protecting children

► Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

reinforces the primary rights of children as international migrants, including by acting in their best interests at all times. It makes special provisions relating to the rights and needs of migrant children, statelessness, child labour, family reunification, child detention and other child-sensitive approaches.

► The New York Declaration of Refugees and Migrants

the precursor to the Global Compact above, recognises that climate change and disasters (which may be caused by climate change) may be among the complex drivers of forced migration and includes specific references to 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.

► Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

set out the rights and responsibilities for the protection of all displaced persons, which includes children.

► The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

recognises specific needs of children in the context of disaster risk, and the role of children and young people as agents of change.

Strengthening international protection

It has been recognised that the international legal framework specifically protecting children in the context of **climate-related displacement** requires further strengthening. There are a number of initiatives underway to address this issue including:

- The Committee on the Rights of the Child 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 Human Rights Council, composed of 47 States, 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 encouraged further research on the rights of child in humanitarian settings. In the context of the impacts on children from natural disasters, humanitarian disasters, forced displacement and climate change it also “calls upon States, as appropriate, to take further effective measures and actions, in conformity with international law, to remove obstacles and constraints, and to strengthen support to meeting the special needs of children, in particular the most vulnerable, with a view to provide all children with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities”.
- The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee recently considered a research proposal that included a recommendation “to undertake to prepare guidelines (‘soft guidelines’) on climate-related displacement and human rights.”
- The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment dedicated his 2018 report to the issue of child rights and the environment including references to displacement from climate-induced disasters. Similarly, 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, including children.
- The Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) seeks to implement and extend the work of the Nansen Initiative’s Protection Agenda to include 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.

Legal frameworks for protecting children

National laws and policies

Countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties and have joined other global commitments with regard to children also have an obligation to ensure those rights and protections are embodied in national law, including in the context of climate-related displacement.

The **IFRC Checklist on Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response** includes a number of recommendations for strengthening national legal frameworks with regard to children, in particular through:

- ▶ Including DPR activities in schools at elementary, secondary and tertiary levels, as well as other awareness and education programmes targeting out-of-school children and youth including disaster preparedness and response in schools as part of contingency planning.
- ▶ Contingency planning for child protection during disasters.



- ▶ Contingency planning for the care of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) during disasters, including:
 - mitigating the risk of parent-caregiver separations;
 - locating, identifying and documenting UASC;
 - providing and monitoring alternative care arrangements for UASC;
 - conducting family tracing and verification; and
 - facilitating family reunification and integration.

UNICEF have also made a number of recommendations for addressing child displacement in the context of climate change at the national level:

- ▶ 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, 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.

Source: UNICEF (2017). [No Place To Call Home—Protecting Children's Rights When The Changing Climate Forces Them To Flee.](#)

Image: Jess van Spengen/IFRC

Empowering children through participation and inclusion

Giving children a voice

Even with appropriate legal frameworks in place at global and national levels, more is needed to ensure that children are adequately protected.

There is an urgent need for adequate and well-coordinated humanitarian and development funding, to ensure that children don't fall through the cracks in when it comes to translating policies into practice.

Moreover, children should not be dismissed as helpless in the face of displacement and climate change. It is of vital importance that children's voices are heard and they are empowered to actively participate in activities and decision-making processes affecting their lives. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that "children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within the family, the school or the community."

UNICEF: Protecting children's rights in the context of climate-related displacement

The 2017 UNICEF report *No Place to Call Home* specifically analyses the issues for children in the context of climate-related displacement.

In addition to numerous protection challenges and recommendations, the report also identifies a number of measures which aim to empower children, including the following:

- 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.



- 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.

Source: UNICEF (2017). *No Place To Call Home—Protecting Children's Rights When The Changing Climate Forces Them To Flee*.

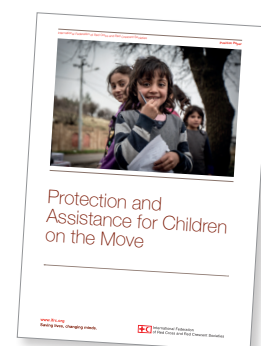
IFRC: Protection and assistance for children on the move

In 2017 the IFRC adopted a position paper which acknowledges the humanitarian mandate, of IFRC and National Societies to protect and assist vulnerable children, including children on the move. The recommendations include:

- Engage with and provide leadership opportunities for girls and boys on the move to identify protection risks and find and implement solutions.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for girls and boys on the move to share their perspectives on decisions and interventions that affect them.
- Enable adolescent girls and boys to take a leadership role in designing and implementing protection and humanitarian assistance projects, where it is appropriate and does not pose any risk to the adolescents.

The IFRC has also been a leading member of the *Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action* which calls upon governments and humanitarian agencies to: "[r]ecognize and strengthen young people's capacities and capabilities to be effective humanitarian actors in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, and empower and support local youth-led initiatives and organizations in humanitarian response, such as those targeting affected youth, including young refugees and internally displaced persons living in informal urban settlements and slums."

Source IFRC (2017). *Protection and Assistance for Children on the Move*.





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