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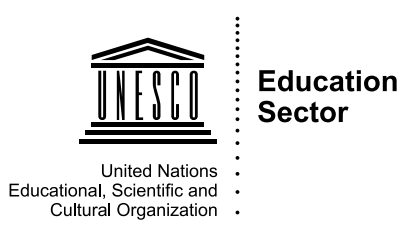
The impact of climate displacement on the right to education

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Examining the educational vulnerabilities linked to climate displacement and the implications for national law and policy

UNESCO Education Sector

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Terminology

Recognizing the lack of settled definitions in this context, this working paper will use the following terms:

Climate displaced persons are those who move for reasons relating to climate change. This phenomenon is referred to as **climate displacement** and covers all forms of human movement, whether internal or cross-border, and whether voluntary to some extent, or forced. Movement may be temporary or permanent and the climate change related trigger may be a slow onset or rapid onset environmental hazard.¹

Climate risk in this context can be measured by a combination of elements, namely, hazard, probability and vulnerability. Climate-related hazards can be slow in their onset, such as sea level rise and changes in temperature and precipitation, while others happen more suddenly, such as storms and flooding. Probability can be associated with the frequency or magnitude of a given hazard, and vulnerability is defined below.²

Planned relocation is a solutions-oriented measure, involving the State, in which a community is physically moved to another location and resettled there with the conditions necessary for rebuilding their lives (Brookings, Georgetown University and UNHCR, 2014).

Trapped populations are those who are unable to migrate to safe locations and remain trapped in locations vulnerable to the impacts of climate hazards. Often, slow onset environmental changes can heighten vulnerability by reducing the very resources that are needed to migrate.³

Vulnerability refers to the propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected by climate hazards and encompasses a variety of concepts and elements including sensitivity or susceptibility to harm and lack of ability to cope and adapt (IPCC, 2014a). Different circumstances can give rise to different forms of vulnerability, whether they be socio-economic, social, environmental or institutional and can contribute to the 'trapped' status of certain populations.

1 The singular use of displacement terminology is intended to simplify the discussion. A distinction is often made between climate displacement and climate migration. 'Displacement' is used to depict a situation where people are *forced* to leave their home or place of habitual residence and 'migration' indicates that the movement was *voluntary*, to a degree (OHCHR, 2017, pp. 3-4; Nansen Initiative, 2015, paras. 16, 20; UNICEF, 2018a, p. 6). However, there is growing consensus that the line between forced and voluntary movement is difficult to draw, as in almost all scenarios there are multiple causes that drive movement (UN Human Rights Council, 2018, para. 16). In the context of the right to education and its universal application it is not necessary to make this distinction. Nevertheless, the verb migrate is still of practical use, alongside terms such as human mobility and human movement, where referring to the physical act of moving from one place to another.

2 For a more detailed exploration of the terms 'climate risk' and 'vulnerability', see technical papers 3 ("Assessing vulnerability for climate adaptation") and 4 ("Assessing current climate risks"), UNDP, 2004.

3 The Foresight Report (2011) brought light to the concept of 'trapped populations', and describes a situation where "those with lower wealth or capital face a double set of risks from future environmental change: their reduced level of capital means that they are unable to move away from situations of increasing environmental threats; yet, at the same time, this very lack of capital makes them even more vulnerable to environmental change." Other interpretations are also possible, for example a situation where certain members of the household are left behind when others migrate, as is often the case for women and children in Bangladesh (Islam and Shamsuddoha, 2017).

Introduction

Warming of the climate has led to visible changes in the environment (IPCC, 2014b). From gradually creeping sea level rise and temperatures, to droughts, floods, cyclones and wildfires, many people around the world are seeing unprecedented effects on their ecosystems and communities. These climate hazards will undoubtedly affect human mobility in the same way that environmental changes, as well as conflict, have played a role in the movement of people throughout history.

It is difficult to predict how many people will be affected by climate displacement in the future. Estimates of cross-border displacement have ranged wildly between 25 million and 1 billion people by 2050 (IOM, 2012), however, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that there is “low confidence in quantitative projections of changes in mobility, due to its complex, multi-causal nature” (IPCC, 2014c, p. 20).

What is certain is that environmental degradation is already causing crises in many regions and large numbers of people are already displaced. In 2019, 23.9 million people were newly displaced by weather-related disasters across 140 countries, almost three times the number of displacements caused by conflict and violence (IDMC, 2020a).⁴ Bangladesh, China, India and the Philippines each recorded more than 4 million disaster displacements. Nevertheless, the conversation often remains focussed on some point in time in the future and is heavily centred on the right to migrate across borders, despite the evidence that internal displacement is more commonplace in this context.

The right to education in the context of large-scale climate displacement and the changes that are necessitated in the way that education is planned, financed and delivered require further exploration. In crises, children and young people in particular are at risk of losing more than just their home and shelter, but

also access to education, training and opportunities that could open the door to their future. Up to now, educational needs have been almost invisible in key climate change discussions and the participation of education systems in these conversations has been marginal (UNICEF, 2019).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is bound by a pledge to *leave no one behind*. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, devoted to education, recognizes that “[n]atural disasters, pandemics and conflicts, and the resulting internal and cross-border displacement, can leave entire generations traumatized, uneducated and unprepared to contribute to the social and economic recovery of their country or region” (UNESCO, 2015). All countries have a responsibility to institute measures to develop rights-based, inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of children, youth and adults in crisis-affected contexts.

This working paper, which builds on UNESCO’s ongoing research and advocacy work into ensuring the right to education for all refugees and migrants, aims to provide an overview of the educational vulnerabilities that climate displaced persons face and some guiding principles for ensuring their right to education. While this first paper mainly focuses on “schooling” as such, the aim is to produce further works related to non-formal education, TVET and adult learning in relation to climate displacement. An overview of the phenomenon of climate displacement is provided in Sections 1 and 2. Section 3 outlines the international legal and policy frameworks at play in the nexus between climate displacement and education. Section 4 explains some of the barriers to education which are faced by climate displaced persons and Section 5 provides some guidance for action that can be undertaken to enforce their right to education and ensure inclusion in national systems. As research into the educational vulnerabilities of climate displaced persons and the particular demands that are consequently placed on education systems is still in its infancy, the paper relies upon a wide range of sources from academia, international organizations and civil society that outline the difficulties traditionally faced by individuals and communities in displacement contexts.

⁴ It is important to note that in many instances it is difficult to attribute any single weather-related disaster to climate change, as often these weather events happen naturally. However, “changing climate leads to changes in the frequency, intensity, spatial extent, duration, and timing of extreme weather and climate events, and can result in unprecedented extreme weather and climate events”. See IPCC, 2012.

Key messages

- Little research has been conducted into the nexus between climate change, displacement and education at this time, thus understanding of the particular barriers to education that are faced is limited. There are few international or regional frameworks that can provide guidance to States as to how to best protect the right to education of climate displaced persons although some emerging responsibilities can be seen with regard to data and monitoring, resilience, preparedness and cooperation.
- Climate displacement is today's problem and cannot be deferred to tomorrow. The volume of people on the move is predicted to increase as the effects of climate change become more severe, affecting every region in the world, and those that are already living in precarious situations will be inherently more vulnerable. Research, discussion, cooperation and action in and for education in these circumstances must begin at once.
- Climate displaced persons are predicted to suffer exceptional educational vulnerabilities by nature of their predicament. A reduction in access to quality, inclusive education will be experienced by many, although for some a move may have positive consequences. Trauma or administrative, financial and linguistic barriers are likely to hinder participation in education where it is available. Internal climate displaced persons and trapped populations may see critical education infrastructure damaged or destroyed by climate change. Furthermore, intersecting vulnerabilities such as gender and disabilities are expected to interact and overlap with climate displacement, creating unique challenges that require further investigation.

1. What is climate displacement?

Climate displacement is often understood as a straightforward causal process whereby people are displaced from their homes by the direct impacts of climate change. In reality, climate displacement is a complex, multi-causal phenomenon and understanding the relationship between environmental change and human mobility can be challenging. The interaction between vulnerability and climate risk is a crucial factor. Population growth, underdevelopment, weak governance and poor urban planning can weaken the resilience of local populations and make households more sensitive to climate stressors (Nansen Initiative, 2015). Climate impacts can affect livelihoods (especially for those reliant on agriculture), opportunities and social networks which can in turn trigger movement. Moreover, gender, economic, political and cultural elements can also interact with environmental factors and impact on migratory decisions (IOM, 2012).

Climate displacement can happen in the context of both slow onset environmental changes that evolve gradually over many years such as sea level rise, increasing average temperatures and desertification,⁵ or rapid onset weather events such as hurricanes and floods.⁶ Different climate hazards can lead to different forms of migration and displacement. Slow onset disasters generally allow more time to prepare and some people, often those with more resources or money, might leave pre-emptively and travel larger distances (Climate and Migration Coalition, *n.d.*). Rapid onset events cause immediate destruction and often create large numbers of displaced persons at once, but displacement is likely to be short distance and temporary. It is important to differentiate between the forms that displacement can take, be it temporary or permanent, internal or international, as the implications for education will not be the same.

There is increasing evidence that conflict and violence have linkages to climate displacement. In some places ecological changes have had a destabilizing effect, leading to state fragility and conflict in countries such

as Syria and Egypt (Werrell et al, 2015) and in the West Africa and Sahel regions. Climate impacts can act as a risk amplifier, as is the case around Lake Chad, where climate change, population growth and unregulated irrigation have led to desertification, deforestation and drought in the surrounding areas and created conflict over scarce resources (UNHCR, 2019). Alternatively, pre-existing conflict can also increase vulnerability in the locale, removing people's capacity to cope with climate change effects and leading to increased out-migration.

Moreover, it is predicted that some countries will suffer a double burden, hosting large numbers of refugees fleeing conflict at the same time as increasing numbers of citizens become internally displaced by climate change impacts. In Uganda, for example, soil degradation, increasing variability of rainfall and raising temperatures is expected to swell the numbers of displaced as pastoralists struggle to find water and pastures (IOM, 2020). Any newly displaced persons will join the 1.425 million refugees that Uganda are already hosting at the present time (UNHCR – Uganda Refugees).

These complex, overlapping relationships are intensifying as the effects of climate change increase in severity and displacement becomes more widespread. The scale and rapidity of the response of all sectors, including education, must match the pace of these catastrophic changes.

⁵ Other slow onset events include ocean acidification, glacial retreat, salinization, land and forest degradation, and loss of biodiversity, for example. See UNFCCC, 2011, para. 25.

⁶ See footnote 2.

2. Who will be affected?

Areas with severe climate risks exist in every region of the world, although some will be particularly severely affected. Asia consistently suffers the highest impact when it comes to natural hazards, accounting for 40% of all disaster events in 2019 and 45% in 2018 (CRED, 2020 / CRED, 2019).⁷ Certain countries have brought awareness to the urgent need to prepare for imminent climate displacement due to their heightened vulnerability. 'Sinking islands' in the Pacific such as Kiribati and Tuvalu are severely affected by sea level rise, salinization and other life-threatening impacts, to the extent that they are rapidly becoming inhabitable. Disasters in the Caribbean such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and Hurricane Dorian that swept catastrophically through the Bahamas produced high levels of visible displacement.

An analysis of climate displacement in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia has produced an estimate of 143 million persons displaced due to slow onset climate impacts by 2050, with the majority of this displacement occurring internally (World Bank, 2018). It is increasingly clear that most climate displacement will remain within State borders, and take place across short distances, as cross-border migration requires financial and social capital that climate displaced persons are likely to be lacking. However, as climate risks increase in the future, it is expected that temporary displacement is likely to lead to permanent migration (IPCC, 2014*b*, p. 71).

Natural hazards are felt more keenly by the poorest people in the poorest countries (World Bank, 2018, p. 21) and countries that have the resources to adapt to environmental degradation and natural hazards are likely to create less climate displaced persons than those that have existing socio-economic vulnerabilities. Of the ten countries most affected by climate risk in the period 1999 to 2018, seven were developing countries in the low income or lower-middle income country group (Germanwatch, 2019). Currently, 9 in 10 of all displaced persons live in low- and middle-income countries

(Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2018*a*, p. 4). The most vulnerable groups will have the fewest opportunities to adapt or move and may become trapped in riskier and riskier settings.

There is increasing evidence that rural and peri-rural communities are disproportionately affected by climate impacts. Climate change can drastically reduce livelihood opportunities in rural areas dependant on agriculture and, combined with food insecurity and poverty, contribute to drivers of migration (FAO, 2017). Resulting trends of urbanization have been witnessed in countries such as Bangladesh (Gemenne et al., 2010) and Vietnam (Evers and Pathirana, 2018) and in the Sub-Saharan Africa region (Henderson et al., 2017).

⁷ For a more detailed regional analysis of climatic risks and impacts and resulting 'climate change hotspots', see maps extracted from the Atlas of Environmental Migration (IOM, 2017).

3. International human rights law and other frameworks related to climate displacement and education

There is currently no international human right based on a normative instrument to enter or remain in another State based on an individual's status as a climate displaced person. Although those displaced by climate change are often referred to as 'climate change refugees', the body of international asylum law is not very relevant in this context.⁸ A refugee is a person who has crossed an international border, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" as outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, article 1(a) (2). The term 'climate change refugee' is misleading by definition as it has proven impossible for climate migrants to prove that they have a well-founded fear of persecution, nor fulfil a nexus with one of the five grounds. As a result, cross-border climate displaced persons are likely to be classed as irregular migrants, unless they have successfully availed of a bilateral agreement or visa, and internal climate displaced persons have no specific protection.

The international normative framework has established the inalienable universal right to education for all, based on the principles of non-discrimination and equality in education. As stated by the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education "[w]omen, men, boys and girls of all ages and backgrounds — whether migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, returnees or internally displaced persons — have the right to education". This is no less true for those fleeing the effects of climate change.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) establishes that "everyone has the right to

education", and the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) specifically requires States to take measures to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment in education, with an explicit obligation "to give foreign nationals resident within their territory the same access to education as that given to their own nationals" (Article 3(e)). The 1960 Convention prohibits any discrimination based, *inter alia*, on social origin, economic condition or birth, protecting the right to education for everyone, including those that are displaced internally or across borders.

The Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications was adopted by UNESCO in 2019 and will reduce the obstacles faced by displaced persons who require recognition of their qualifications to access higher education or continue their studies in another region or country. The body of international treaties protecting the universal right to education also includes: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

These instruments place some common core obligations on States as duty-bearers, such as to: provide free and compulsory primary education; make secondary education generally available and accessible with progressive introduction of free education; make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free secondary and higher education (ICESCR, 1966, art. 13); encourage or intensify "fundamental education" for students who have not received or completed primary education; improve the quality of education; improve the material

⁸ However, in January 2020 the UN Human Rights Committee ruled on a complaint by an individual seeking asylum from the effects of climate change in New Zealand. Although in this individual case the claim was unsuccessful, the Committee stated that the effects of climate change could trigger the *non-refoulement* obligations of sending states where threats to the right to life (art. 6) or the possibility of being subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 7) even before the risk is realized. This is a landmark ruling and paves the way individuals to claim a right to asylum based on rapid onset and slow onset environmental processes. See Human Rights Committee, 2020.

conditions for teaching staff; end discrimination and guarantee educational freedom of choice (UNESCO, 2019a). To these ends, States are bound by the principle of non-retrogression and obligated to allocate the maximum level of available resources to education, with a view to achieving progressively the right to education for all (ICESCR, 1966, art. 2).

A number of international policy frameworks bring growing attention to the direct and indirect consequences of human mobility for education. The New York Declaration and subsequent Global Compacts on migrants and refugees are huge achievements, representing a burgeoning global consensus with regard to the obligations of States towards people on the move. The New York Declaration makes specific mention of those that move in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters or other environmental factors in the first paragraph.⁹ The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, acknowledges that climate change is a common concern of humankind and states that Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, and, among others, the rights of migrants. The Agreement also requested the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts (WIM) to Establish a task force to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change. These recommendations were included in the report of the 24th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 24).¹⁰ Furthermore, article 11 of the UNESCO Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change of 2017 invites States to ensure that all people have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them to acquire and update the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed

9. "Since earliest times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of new economic opportunities and horizons. Others move to escape armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations and abuses. Still others do so in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters (some of which may be linked to climate change), or other environmental factors. Many move, indeed, for a combination of these reasons." (UNGA, 2016)

10. See (UNFCCC, 2019)

to respond to climate change and contribute to sustainable development. Some key principles can be found in these documents and other international policy frameworks:

i) Strengthening the resilience of education systems in countries affected by climate change.

States should invest in programmes that eliminate the adverse drivers that compel people to leave their place of origin, including those relating to education (UN General Assembly, 2018a, para. 18(b); Nansen Initiative, 2015, para. 78). SDG11 calls on States to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" and together with SDG9 (building resilient infrastructure) and SDG4 (education) there is an indivisible duty on States to make efforts to build physically and structurally resilient education systems (United Nations, 2015a). The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030 (United Nations, 2015b) provides Member States with concrete actions to protect development gains from the risk of disaster and has been interpreted for the education sector in the Comprehensive School Safety Global Framework (2017).

ii) Preparing for displacement.

The current and emerging realities call for increased preparedness, solidarity, responsibility and burden sharing and cooperation to avoid or respond to climate displacement. These preparatory actions will depend on the climate risks at stake. Accelerating action on climate change mitigation will begin to halt the disastrous effects in some countries, but where climate impacts are already making life untenable, States must consider how to decrease the vulnerabilities of communities and provide assistance to currently displaced persons. States are encouraged to clarify and ensure full respect of the human rights of cross-border displaced persons, including the right to education, and provide access to assistance that meets this basic need (Nansen Initiative, 2015).

iii) Facilitating orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration.

Planned and well-managed migration policies will contribute enormously to the protection of the right to education of climate displaced persons. Target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda, the New York Declaration, the Global Compact for Migration and the WIM recommendations on integrated approaches to averting, minimizing and addressing displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change (WIM recommendations) all call upon States to enhance the availability and flexibility of regular migration. The Global Compact for Migration specifically calls for the provision of access to education for those displaced by sudden onset natural disasters and other precarious situations. Well-managed migration is sometimes referred to as *migration with dignity*. By envisaging migration as a positive adaptation measure to cope with the effects of climate change, States could review bilateral and (sub-) regional migration agreements to determine how they could facilitate regular migration (Nansen Initiative, 2015). Not moving towards the facilitation of regular migration is no longer a no-risk option in a world where climate risks are increasing in severity year on year and States must recognize that a lack of action is extremely dangerous for displaced populations.

iv) Providing education to displaced persons with the least possible delay.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) call on States to ensure that education and training facilities are made available to internally displaced persons, in particular adolescents and women, as soon as conditions permit in principle 23 (4). The Guiding Principles have been codified in the Kampala Convention by the African Union, thereby making it a legally binding obligation for African signatories to provide adequate humanitarian assistance, including education, “with the least possible delay” (2009, art. 9 (2)(b)). The New York Declaration created a commitment between States to ensure that all cross-border migrant children receive education within a few months of arrival, and the prioritization of budgetary provision to facilitate this.

v) Developing better data, concepts and evidence to draft evidence-based policies.

The programme of action of the Global compact on refugees recalls that reliable, comparable, and timely data is critical for evidence-based measures to identify and plan appropriate solutions. The WIM recommendations invite Parties to enhance research, data collection, risk analysis and sharing of information to better map, understand and manage human mobility related to the adverse impacts of climate change. Besides, objective 1 of the Global Compact for Migration commits States to strengthening the global evidence base on international migration to ensure that this data fosters research and guides coherent and evidence-based policymaking.

vi) Cooperating on a regional and international level.

The New York Declaration iterates the need for States to assist neighbouring or transit countries that may be disproportionately affected by migration. Climate change is a global phenomenon that does not respect borders and therefore there must be global solutions that ensure the right to education is not overlooked. States should also work with UNESCO to develop UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP) schemes. UQPs are standardized documents detailing the qualifications a refugee or migrant is likely to have based on the available evidence and can be a life-changing tool for modern mobility, intended to allow refugees and vulnerable migrants to move with dignity and assure basic rights to higher education, life-long learning and the labour market.¹¹

¹¹ To find out more about the UNESCO Qualifications Passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants, see <https://en.unesco.org/news/what-you-need-know-about-unesco-qualifications-passport-refugees-and-vulnerable-migrants> (Accessed 17 June 2020).

4. The dimensions of climate displacement and their expected impacts on education

At present, limited research has been conducted which investigates the impact of climate displacement on education. Nevertheless, inferences can be made from analogous situations. What challenges do irregular migrants traditionally face in accessing education? What sort of obstacles to education do internally displaced persons experience? Although some preliminary predictions can be made, further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of how these barriers function in this specific context.

Cross-border climate displacement

Most climate displaced persons remain within their own country, but some may cross borders in order to reach safety, or seek protection in another State (Nansen Initiative, 2015). Displaced persons are more likely to leave their country if they are unable to secure access to vital services and long-term solutions (OHCHR / Platform on Disaster Displacement, 2018).

Those that are displaced across borders will face barriers to their education that are similar to those faced by other migrants and refugees:¹²

- **Limited resources** can be a problem in countries that already host large numbers of refugees and migrants and consequently it can be a struggle to provide access to education for all (UNESCO, 2019a). In Uganda, which hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa (Momodu, 2019), schools which are in or near refugee settlements are often understaffed and overcrowded and have limited availability of classrooms, desks and school materials (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2018b). As a result, children affected by climate migration are likely to lack access to quality education, further intensifying inequalities. (UNESCO, 2019a).

- **Administrative barriers** are to be anticipated for climate displaced persons. Students might require certain documents to enrol in schools or colleges, such as birth certificates or school transcripts. When people migrate, these documents are often left behind or lost, which can impede enrolment (UNESCO, 2019a).
- **Law and policies which exclude irregular migrants or non-citizens from national education systems** may also apply to climate displaced persons, who currently lack formal legal pathways to migrate. Without a regular legal status, irregular migrants might avoid registering in the national education system for fear of discovery and deportation (OHCHR, 2014). Harsh enforcement practices of migration authorities, such as the use of detention centres, can cause trauma and disrupt schooling. Children in detention centres rarely have access to adequate education, play or leisure facilities.
- **Financial barriers** are foreseeable, particularly where the education system in the host country has direct or indirect costs which are difficult to meet. Climate change impacts are expected to exacerbate poverty (IPCC, 2014b) and displacement will add further financial challenges. In difficult financial situations, children and adolescents who arrive in new countries may prioritize work, often forced to do so by their circumstances or under pressure to send money back home to support their families (UNICEF, 2017, p. 11).
- **Linguistic barriers.** Language barriers can lead to frustration, lower performance and ultimately, drop out (UNESCO, 2019a). It may take some time before a language barrier is overcome and a child, youth or adult is able to begin to learn, although multilingual education can help. Language can also be used as a form of exclusion and can drive conflict and cultural oppression, therefore a sensitive handling of linguistic issues in education is critical to promote ethnic tolerance in newly integrated communities (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000).

¹² In 2018 - 2019, UNESCO undertook research into the extensive barriers to education faced by refugees and migrants, as well as compiling some practical examples and promising measures taken by States. Barriers which are likely to be relevant to the circumstances of climate displaced persons have been transposed here, on the inference that many of the challenges will remain the same. For more information and sources for this information, see UNESCO, 2019a, pp. 8 - 17.

- **Xenophobia and violence** can lead to displaced persons shutting themselves off from the community and children may be prevented from attending mainstream educational institutions (OHCHR, 2014, p. 83). If hate speech, intimidation and bullying are able to flourish in the classroom, this is likely to lead to low morale and students abandoning school (UNESCO, 2019a).
- **The trauma of displacement** can affect educational performance. The upheaval of a journey and the instability of living arrangements in a new environment can make it difficult to learn (UNICEF, 2017, p. 13). Mental health needs might not be met in the education system, and teachers may be poorly trained or lack the additional time needed to support children dealing with trauma and stress (UNESCO, 2019a, p. 11).

Internal climate displacement

The majority of climate displaced persons are predicted to remain within their country of origin. Displacement, whether caused by conflict or disaster, typically leads to loss of land, homes and property, loss of employment or livelihood, food insecurity, lack of access to basic services and poor access to education (UN Human Rights Council, 2015). Internally displaced persons often live in poverty and are highly vulnerable.

Internal climate displaced persons are predicted to face many of the same barriers to education as cross-border displaced persons. Financial hardship and administrative barriers may prevent enrolment or hinder attendance. Linguistic barriers can also exist for internally displaced persons, especially minorities and indigenous peoples (UNICEF / IDMC, 2019). Access to quality education may be limited, particularly in areas that are managing a large influx of displaced persons. Internally displaced children frequently contribute economically to displaced communities, meaning education takes a back seat. Trauma is also likely to affect schooling. Three years after Hurricane Katrina in the United States, for example, children were found to be negatively affected by displacement and issues with behaviour and impacts on attendance, suspension, expulsion and drop-out rates were also observed (UNICEF, 2018a).

Internal climate displaced persons may find themselves vulnerable in ways particular to their situation, too.

- **Physical damage to education infrastructure** caused by climate disasters will affect those that are unable to move far from their homes. School buildings and water, sewage and electrical systems may be damaged, resources may become scarce and education systems will crumble in these conditions (UNICEF, 2017, p. 13). Schools may become physically unsafe places to be and it will take time to rebuild, during which education comes to a standstill. Similarly, schools may be taken over to provide shelter for communities that have lost their homes in the wake of disaster (UNICEF, 2018a, p. 13), just as they are often used for military purposes in times of conflict. Due to the lack of infrastructure, governments often respond to crises by providing education to internally displaced children outside the formal system, but informal schooling often lacks qualified teachers, certified examination procedures and can be funded unreliably (UNICEF / IDMC, 2019).
- **As well as official discrimination** towards students that lack documentation, schools and local authorities may be reluctant to accept displaced children from different ethnic, linguistic or religious groups (UN Human Rights Council, 2015).
- **Internal displacement can become protracted** and families that believed they would return quickly to their homes may not make the necessary efforts to enrol their children in education during their displacement (UN Human Rights Council, 2015).
- **Urbanization can put pressure on cities to provide education to growing numbers.** It is predicted that climate change effects in rural areas could amplify migration to urban centres, following the dominant pattern of urbanization in human mobility (IPCC, 2014d; UK Government Office for Science, 2011). Sometimes, this type of movement can have positive impacts on education, depending on the characteristics of the receiving areas (World Bank, 2018). However, some countries might put into place measures to curb this trend of rural to urban migration. Vietnam, for example, has a system of household registration which has been shown to restrict access to education for those with temporary status, although this is now being reformed (World Bank, 2016).

- **Circular or temporary displacement is predicted to disrupt schooling.** Circular migration may be a solution where areas become inhabitable for periods of the year due to extreme seasonal weather or livelihoods have been negatively affected by the effects of climate change. In Bangladesh, seasonal labour migration has long been a strategy for poor rural populations (McAdam, 2012, p. 22). There is evidence that seasonal labour migration can be disruptive for education and expose children to child labour and workplace hazards such as abuse and exploitation (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2018a, p.20).

Planned relocation

States may try to find proactive solutions for communities who find themselves vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and it is anticipated that strategies of planned relocation will become more commonplace (UNHCR et al., 2014). Countries such as Fiji have plans underway for relocating communities, and some Alaskan communities are petitioning for assistance to move to safer land. Planned relocation should follow a human rights-based approach and therefore considerations of the right to education should be an integral part of the resettlement strategy, however obstacles may still arise.

- **Risks of landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality and social disarticulation¹³ (Cernea, 1999) may all put education in jeopardy.** If planning is insufficient, then relocation schemes can prolong displacement and increase the vulnerability of many. A lack of coordination between government agencies and departments and across different levels of government may create risk (McAdam and Ferris, 2015).
- **Poorer access to or quality in education** has been envisaged for those who are left behind and also host populations (World Bank, 2011). Without solid planning, educational establishments may be closed (decommissioned) in the original site due to a decline

¹³ Cernea describes 'social disarticulation' as the tearing apart of the existing social fabric. Planned relocation "disperses and fragments communities, dismantles patterns of social organization and interpersonal ties; kinship groups become scattered as well" (1999, p. 25). It is important to recognize that displacement and relocation lead to a loss of social capital which compound the loss of natural, physical and human capital.

in users and the education system in the relocation site could be stretched to absorb the new inhabitants.

- **Trauma** is likely to be experienced by relocated persons, even though their displacement should be well-planned and with consent. There is no guarantee that the relocated group will assimilate easily, and therefore feelings of disenfranchisement, dislocation and displacement can live on through generations (McAdam and Ferris, 2015). Planned relocation has the potential to exacerbate underlying tensions in communities and spark frictions and conflicts, thereby unsettling social cohesion in both relocation sites and places of origin (UNHCR et al., 2014). These psychological effects may impact on the way that relocated persons interact with local education systems and could lead to exclusionary practices or bullying.

Trapped populations

Climate displacement does not only affect those that leave, but also those that are left behind. There is increasing evidence that fleeing the effects of climate change may be a 'luxury' and only for the privileged few. In New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, for example, the wealthy were able to migrate proactively, whilst the lower-income and less educated population group remained in their homes or sought shelter in emergency shelters in the aftermath (UK Government Office for Science, 2011, p. 14). In fact, populations who experience the impacts of climate change may suffer a decrease in the very capital that is required to make a move. This subsection of people will lack the financial, social, political or even physical assets to migrate away from these environmentally dangerous areas.

Sometimes, certain members of the household might move, leaving others behind. In some countries which already have high levels of migration, such as Bangladesh, men are more likely to move internationally, leaving women at home, dependant on remittances (World Bank, 2018). In other countries, the mother or both parents might move for work, while children are left behind with the other parent or family members.

- **Remaining in an unstable environment** when others have left is likely to have negative consequences for the education system in place. Post-disaster,

education infrastructure may be destroyed or damaged, teachers and school personnel may have left and there may be indirect effects such as loss of livelihood, food and water insecurity or physical danger in the environment. States that are suffering severe environmental degradation may not prioritize the reinstatement of education, but instead survival basics such as food and water.

- In the context of labour migration, it has been found that the **educational outcomes of children that are left behind by one or both parents tend to suffer**. This pattern has been seen in countries such as China, where one in three rural children are left behind by migrating parents (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2018a). Children may benefit from remittances which enable them to go school, but may also suffer destitution, neglect, abuse or trauma from the experience of being 'abandoned' by one or both parents (UN Human Rights Council, 2010, para. 76).

Multiplying vulnerabilities

Climate change can exacerbate existing local and global inequalities. Most climate displaced persons are situated in countries with significant poor populations and stretched education systems. Where this is the case, the situation becomes particularly challenging as children reach secondary education, when resources become scarcer and education costs more due to specialized equipment, more sophisticated learning materials and the need for higher qualified teachers (UNHCR, 2018). At the same time, climate change effects often impact on livelihoods and household incomes, factors which are known to negatively affect attendance and participation in education. Other unique characteristics and situations interact in a complex manner with climate change and climate risk, multiplying the vulnerabilities faced in education.

Gender

There is increasing evidence that gender plays a role in the educational opportunities offered to children in displacement, with girls often the first to be removed from school when finances are limited or remaining in school but heavily burdened by household chores (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO,

2019a). In Somalia for example, following a spate of rural to urban migration related to flooding, drought and conflict, there was evidence of an increase in the average enrolment in schools. However, when the figures were broken down, it appeared that while boys' enrolment increased after the move, girl's enrolment rate dropped significantly (IDMC, 2020b). Boys were advantaged by no longer being needed to help parents in agro-pastoralist activities as they had before their displacement, whereas it is assumed the cost of schooling was the main barrier preventing girls from attending school in their host area.

In displacement settings, girls have been shown to face barriers to their education such as a lack of safe transportation and inadequate gender-responsive teacher training (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2019a). In refugee camps, wide enrolment gaps between boys and girls have been evidenced. Half of the world's 3.5 million refugee children do not attend school, and there are fewer than seven refugee girls for every ten refugee boys in secondary school (UNHCR, 2017). Many schools for refugees lack appropriate toilet facilities and menstrual supplies, and often girls would rather miss school than deal with the lack of privacy (World Bank, 2005). Furthermore, child marriage and gender-based violence are known risk factors in displacement settings, where a lack of economic opportunities for girls leads to reliance on men, an increase in early pregnancy and marriage and related school drop-out (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2019a).

Boys will also suffer gender-specific challenges. Undocumented and unaccompanied migrant minors have been found to be largely male. In Italy 92% of unaccompanied minors that arrived in 2016 were boys, and despite efforts to integrate these children in schools, only a minority were found to be in regular attendance (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2019a). In some countries, in particular those in Latin America and the Caribbean, boys have lower education attainment and completion rates in normal circumstances (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2019b). This is often linked to disadvantage stemming from poverty leading to demands for them to find work, a situation that is expected to be exacerbated by increasing levels of displacement in the region.

Indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples may be unable to access education that upholds their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge or language. Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to environmental change, living in fragile or pristine ecosystems and sustained by the land and traditional practices. Displacement would pose an “existential threat to a wealth of cultural and spiritual traditions tied inextricably to their homelands” (Minority Rights Group International, 2019, p. 13). Indigenous peoples in normal circumstances face lack of access to quality education, whether due to lack of access to teaching materials and poor school infrastructure in rural areas, or a lack of culturally appropriate services such as mother-tongue education in urban areas (UN General Assembly, 2014). In the event of displacement, it is likely that the marginalized status of indigenous peoples in education will be compounded.¹⁴

Disabilities

In non-displacement settings, disabilities consistently reduce the chance of school attendance by around 30% (UNICEF, 2018b). In crisis and displacement contexts, there is a risk that the inclusivity of education will be sacrificed. For refugee children with disabilities, access to education depends on the extent to which their needs are identified and addressed; however, disabilities are often ignored among refugee populations as they can attract social stigma or fear of rejection by immigration or government authorities (Smith-Khan and Crock, 2018). For girl children with disabilities, this is especially the case. Displacement settings create a unique combination of barriers for those with disabilities, including accessibility and mobility issues, a lack of training in teachers and lack of assistive devices.

Crisis-affected populations and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disproportionate disadvantages and inequality that displaced learners face in education, particularly times of crisis. Displaced learners and communities face an alarming level of risk from the COVID-19 pandemic, in

some contexts such as camps and informal settlements they are not even able to adopt basic restrictive measures such as social distancing. Furthermore, attending school and learning was already a daily challenge for many displaced learners and there is now a fear that many will not return after lockdowns lift and a lengthy absence (UNHCR, 2020).

Distance learning, widely deployed to facilitate the continuity of education, often relies on access to technology such as mobile phones and television along with access to reliable internet connectivity, which is routinely absent, unavailable or restricted in some displacement contexts. This illustrates the need for identifying, mainstreaming and addressing the educational needs through the inclusion of displaced persons to avoid the entrenchment and perpetuation of existing inequalities in and through education.

Moreover, crisis-affected populations, including refugees and displaced persons, will have vulnerabilities that multiply and increasingly intersect in the context of climate change. Education may have already been severely disrupted and educational resources, teachers and infrastructure are likely to be lacking. Social safety nets may be inadequate with those that do exist disrupted, adding to the precariousness of displaced learners, and this could happen against the backdrop of hardening of migration policies impacting the ability of learners to access and continue learning (UNESCO, 2020).

¹⁴ For more information on the barriers that indigenous peoples face in education, see UNESCO, 2019b.

5. Guidance for Action

It is essential that policymakers and the international education community take note of the increasing urgency of this issue and begin to integrate climate risk into all planning, discourse and action across the board. Funding and technical solutions must be found and made available to prepare for large-scale displacement.

There is still much research to be done before it is possible to fully understand the nexus between climate change, displacement and education and suggest recommendations for policymakers. However, a number of specific solutions that have been found to benefit displaced populations generally can be prioritized and actioned immediately, regardless of whether movement is directly related to climate hazards or other causes.

i) Filling the knowledge and data gaps

Collecting data on climate displaced populations is paramount to close the knowledge gap in this area and develop evidence-based laws and policies. Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Migration iterates the commitment of States to strengthen the global evidence base on international migration by investing in the collection of data, disaggregated by sex, age, migration status and other characteristics, at local, national, regional and global levels (para. 17). Capturing data on internally displaced populations is equally important to plan and budget accordingly for education (UNICEF / IDMC, 2019, p. 9). 5.1 million people were estimated to be living in internal displacement due to disasters at the end of 2019, although it is recognized that the real figure is likely to be much higher, as little data is collected on how long people are displaced for following disasters (IDMC, 2020a).

Alongside more data and evidence relating to climate displacement, more must be done to understand how displaced children, youths and adults are being integrated in (or excluded from) national education systems. There is a recognized lack of disaggregated, reliable and up-to-date data on displaced learners (NORRAG, 2019). Climate displaced persons and the causes and patterns of their movement should be incorporated into education management information systems and learning outcomes should be monitored.

ii) Aligning legislation to ensure the right to education is protected for all

Legislation can be used as a lever for a more conducive policy environment (UNESCO, 2019a). States should ensure that the right to education is protected in law and policy for all within the territory, without discrimination, regardless of citizenship, residency or any other legal status. Any existing administrative barriers should be carefully reconsidered. The requirement of official documentation, such as birth certificates or official school transcripts, for enrolment in education, is a known obstacle to education for internally displaced persons and cross-border migrants and should be explicitly prohibited in national law (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2018a, p. 267). Ratification of the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) will encourage States to translate the principles of non-discrimination and equality in education into national legal systems and, similarly, ratification of the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (2019) and introduction of UNESCO Qualifications Passports will reduce the obstacles faced in accessing further education and the labour market in displacement settings.

iii) Strategizing for resilience in the education system through policy and planning

The education sector should prioritize preparedness, including policy measures which can anticipate risk and respond to the educational needs of children and adults in crisis situations.

Governments and their partners should follow the concrete guidance found in the Comprehensive School Safety Global Framework (2017). The framework includes concrete guidance for governments and their partners to strengthen the capacity of learners, education staff, schools and education administrations to prevent, prepare for and respond to natural hazards. This includes multi-hazard risk assessments as a foundation for identifying localized risk reduction strategies.

A more comprehensive approach to strengthening the resilience of the education system – so called crisis-sensitive educational planning, is promoted by the UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP). It involves both fostering political leadership for effective crisis response and technical approaches to bolstering education systems in the face of crises. The basis for crisis-sensitive planning is identifying and analysing the risks to education posed by conflict and natural hazards, including climate risks, to inform the development of education policies and plans that help to lessen the negative impact of crises on the individual learner, teacher and the education administration and prevent disasters through adequate preparedness and mitigation measures. A key part of crisis-sensitive planning is overcoming inequity and exclusion in education, including for displaced populations. By addressing climate risks through planning, education investments can be protected, learners and education staff remain safe, and education continuity can be assured. Concrete examples include Ministries of Education ensuring safe school location based on climate predictions, school contingency plans in the wake of extreme weather phenomena and education emergency plans that help to solicit funds for immediate education response measures.

Climate displacement in particular will necessitate a ‘whole-of-government’ and system-wide approach, fostering cooperation between departments, divisions and ministries addressing the interrelated issues which arise (UNESCO, 2019a). Whether internal or cross-border, climate displacement has important ramifications for health, labour, social welfare and the environment, often in ways that interact with the education sector.

iv) Ensuring access to education for all climate displaced persons through concrete measures

One of the biggest challenges States will face is the reliable provision of access to quality, inclusive education in the context of climate displacement. It is difficult to predict the numbers or channels of human mobility with accuracy and disasters can create a large number of displaced persons almost instantaneously, therefore education systems need to be strengthened to the extent that they are prepared to absorb displaced persons rapidly and efficiently without much warning. This will require investment.

States should ensure that displaced persons are included in education at the earliest stage possible, as both the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Global Compact for Migration call for. Specifically, integrating displaced persons into the national education system, rather than informal or alternative systems, is paramount (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2018a, p. 267).

Encouraging measures that States could adopt may include:

- The removal of financial barriers to education, both direct and indirect. For climate displaced persons, conditional cash transfers, scholarship programmes or grants could relieve some of the hidden costs of learning. The provision of free technical and vocational education and higher education will give climate displaced persons the opportunity to invest in skills to rebuild their lives.
- For children of seasonal workers, expected to increase in number as climate change effects become more severe, governments may consider flexible school calendars, systems which can track progression in education where children are able to exit and enter schools to fit with migratory patterns and curricula relevant to their livelihoods (Global Education Monitoring Report / UNESCO, 2018a).
- Investigation into alternative learning methods and pathways. COVID-19 has forced a burst of productivity in the area of alternative learning methods where children are unable to attend school. Technology can fill immediate resource gaps but should not be a long-term stand-in for integration into the education system as it is not equally available to all and can entrench and perpetuate existing inequalities in and through education.

v) Making adjustments to ensure quality education for climate displaced persons

Climate displaced persons may need some support to integrate successfully in a new place. Multilingual education and intensive language classes with qualified teachers will be necessary in many cases (UNESCO, 2019a). Accelerated learning programmes can provide a viable pathway to formal learning opportunities, especially for over-age and out of school youth. Curriculum choice is also an important barometer of

quality. When displaced persons are outside of the national education system, the use of the national curriculum of host countries should still be prioritized where feasible, thereby providing access to qualified teachers, materials and certified education offers (UN General Assembly, 2018b).

Governments may need to invest in initial and ongoing teacher training that builds core competences and allows teachers to deal with diverse challenges, from a multilingual and multicultural classroom, to the trauma and stress of their students. Teachers will be at the frontline in tackling xenophobia, negative stereotypes and discrimination in the classroom and should be trained accordingly.

vi) Inequalities and multiplying vulnerabilities are an important consideration

The complexity of climate displacement must not overshadow investigation into the ways that existing inequalities interact with human mobility to create different education experiences.

Girls, in particular, appear to face additional barriers to education in the context of displacement, especially when families are under financial stress. Governments should tackle gender-based stereotypes and ensure that learning environments are welcoming to girls with separate latrines, sanitary materials, and female teachers and do not exclude pregnant girls or adolescent mothers (UNICEF / IDMC, 2019, p. 10). Legal and policy measures which protect girls from harassment and gender-based violence in education will have particular worth in displacement settings. Countries with large numbers of unaccompanied minors should make special efforts to ensure that they are integrated in the national education system and provided with the necessary social support to remain in school.

Similarly, policy-makers should consider how language, ethnicity, race, disabilities, health, socio-economic status and other characteristics interact with climate risks, human mobility and education vulnerability.

vii) Regional and international cooperation and increased funding

The right to education of climate displaced persons can be better protected by international, regional and bilateral agreements that respond to their particular circumstances. Creating legal channels of international migration will reduce the vulnerabilities that irregular migrants face in accessing education. The development of specific frameworks and tools can provide guidance on how States can fulfil their legal obligations under international human rights law to provide inclusive, quality education to people in all displacement settings.

Climate displacement will disproportionately affect low or middle-income countries, requiring support from international partners. Under Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), States have the obligation to use the maximum of their available resources in order to progressively realize the right to education for all. States also have an obligation to seek international assistance and cooperation, while States in a position to do so have a duty to provide such international assistance and cooperation (UNESCO, 2019a, p. 65).

Financing such a large-scale problem will require the mobilization of national governments alongside humanitarian, development and private sector funders to ensure displaced persons and host communities continue to be educated. The New York Declaration calls for a 'whole-of-society' approach and describes cross-border migration as an international responsibility that calls for equitable burden-sharing when it comes to hosting and supporting the displaced. This is even truer in the context of climate displacement, where those that have had the least responsibility for climate change are also those that will suffer the gravest consequences. Countries that do not host large numbers of climate displaced persons should support less developed host countries who bear the brunt of this educational burden where they have the capacity to do so.

Conclusion

This working paper has sought to draw attention to some of the inequalities faced by climate displaced persons in the context of education. Although conclusions can be drawn from existing data and research into other displaced populations, the time has come for increased attention to be paid to the particular circumstances of those affected by the impacts of climate change.

The right to education of climate displaced persons must be protected, respected and fulfilled systematically, holistically and comprehensively. Firstly, migration policies should include consideration for education. Emergency displacement and its negative consequences for education can be avoided with well-managed and planned migration. This outlook requires decisive action from States to work pre-emptively and responsively in areas where displacement is imminent

and happening now. Simultaneously, national education laws and policies must be designed to prepare education systems for mass upheaval. A better understanding is needed of the obstacles that climate displaced persons face in accessing quality, inclusive education, whether they are displaced internally, across borders or undergoing planned relocation. Trapped populations cannot be forgotten.

Urgent and effective action must be taken today to ensure the provision of education in these disrupted circumstances and that education systems are able to withstand the pressures of displacement and heightened mobility. International organizations, policymakers, civil society and other stakeholders must work together to limit the irreversible damage that will be inflicted if the right to education is not upheld in all displacement settings.

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The impact of climate displacement on the right to education

As the number of people forced to move due to climate change increases, more attention should be drawn on the inequalities faced by climate displaced persons in the context of education.

The working paper provides an overview of the challenges faced by climate displaced people to exercise their right to education and some guidelines on how to ensure it.

Countries have a responsibility to develop rights-based, inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of climate displaced children. Migration policies should include consideration for education and States need to work pre-emptively and responsively in areas where displacement is imminent.

Urgent and effective action must be taken today to ensure the provision of education in these disrupted circumstances and that education systems are able to withstand the pressures of displacement and heightened mobility.

