

# Climate Mobility and Children

A VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM

SUMMARY REPORT

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# About



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**Authored by:** Cristina Colón and Lucy Szaboova

**Copy editing:** Eve Leckey

**Art direction:** Mariana Amaral

**Design:** Grace Leong

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# Glossary

**Adaptation** – adjustments in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects or impacts.

**Best interests determination (BID)** – describes the formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child. It should facilitate adequate child participation without discrimination, involve decision-makers with relevant areas of expertise, and balance all relevant factors in order to assess the best option.

**Children** – as per UN Convention on the Rights of the child, children refers to persons up to the age of 18.

**Displacement** – the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.

**Immobility** – the state or condition of being unable to change one's location, move or be moved. Can be voluntary or involuntary.

**Migrant** – an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.

**Migration** – the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State.

**Mitigation** – efforts to reduce or prevent emission of greenhouse gases.

**Mobility** – the ability of individuals, families or groups of people to choose their place of residence.

**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.

**Rapid onset climate change** – refers to sudden and acute events such as severe storms, floods, wildfires, etc.

**Refugee** – a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of the above reasons, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

**Resilience** – ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate.

**Slow-onset climate change** – refers to the risks and impacts associated with increasing temperatures, desertification, loss of biodiversity, land and forest degradation, glacial retreat and related impacts, ocean acidification, sea level rise, and salinization.

**Young people** – as per UN definition, young people refers to those between the ages of 18 and 24.



# Introduction



# Introduction



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As average temperatures continue to soar, the impacts of a changing climate are felt by millions globally. It is estimated that growing numbers of adults and children are displaced from their homes every year due to climate-related causes. Last year alone, we have witnessed wildfires and cyclones destroying homes and livelihoods, taking lives and forcing many to seek shelter and refuge elsewhere. According to the latest [data](#) natural disasters were responsible for the displacement of 24.9 million people worldwide in 2019 – the highest figure recorded to date in a single year. Such manifestations of climate change are no longer reserved for the developing world, as demonstrated by the wildfires that have swept through parts of the United States and Australia, and by the severe flooding that inundated entire towns and vast expanses of farmland in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the latest [Global Report on Internal Displacement](#) shows that nearly a million people were displaced in the US during 2019.

It is in this context that awareness has been growing about the links between adverse climate impacts and different forms of human movement that unfold within countries and across borders. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [Fourth Assessment Report](#) predicted that the impact of droughts on water supplies and the destruction of habitats by weather extremes such as tropical cyclones will make population migration increasingly inevitable. Climate change impacts are particularly felt by some of the most vulnerable groups in society, concentrated in densely populated areas, highly exposed to climate hazards and largely dependent on resource-based livelihoods. It is now widely [recognised](#) that climate change contributes – directly and indirectly – to the movement of at-risk populations by exacerbating existing environmental, social, economic, political and demographic challenges. As such, climate change acts as a threat multiplier, which compounds existing vulnerabilities. As global temperatures continue to rise, the nature of human mobility responses will most likely [change](#), calling for different policy responses.

The relationship between climate change and human mobility is by no means simple or linear, but rather consists of multiple interlinked factors and dimensions that shape mobility responses to climate change impacts. For example, the same climate change manifestation taking place in different geographic settings may result in different mobility responses. An often-overlooked aspect of the climate and mobility nexus are those who cannot or choose not to move, often designated as 'trapped', 'left behind' or 'immobile' populations.





The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of public health measures on mobility have highlighted the unique needs of and difficulties facing these groups.

While children represent a significant proportion of all migrants and refugees, there is an apparent void surrounding children in emerging scientific and policy debates on climate-related mobility. Very little research has been done to investigate the lived experiences of children in this context. The noticeable absence of evidence is mirrored by a lack of policy focus on children in this space. There are no legal frameworks that articulate the specific needs and protection of children who move due to the impacts of climate change, and one has to look hard for policy documents that even make reference to children.

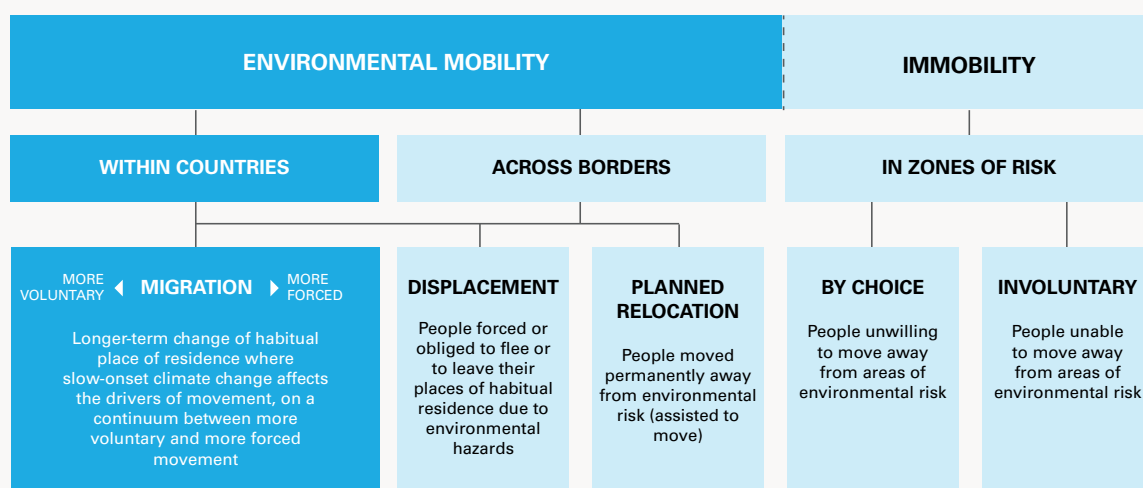


# The symposium

To better understand how children and young people are affected by migration and displacement linked to climate change, and to enhance their visibility in the public policy discourse, UNICEF and IOM jointly hosted a virtual symposium entitled Climate Mobility and Children in early November 2020. The event was attended by 45 experts, including representatives from UN agencies, academia, civil society, policymakers, as well as young climate and migration activists. The group spent two half days exploring existing debates surrounding climate-related mobilities, and deliberated opportunities for integrating children's needs and rights into evolving policy discussions and future legal frameworks.

The rich and diverse conversations that have taken place during the symposium can be organized under three key themes: narratives and language that shape public perceptions of climate related mobility; the information gap on child specific climate-related mobility; and the protection gap manifested in the absence of children in policy and legal frameworks addressing climate mobility. Taking these issues into account, participants also deliberated on possible solutions and articulated a set of recommendations that could pave the path to more inclusive and child-centric approaches.

**FIGURE 1: TYPES OF MOBILITY ASSOCIATED WITH ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS**



Source: Adapted from World Bank (2018): Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Migration.

Note: Mobility and immobility are not mutually exclusive.

# The themes



# The themes

## THE CLIMATE MIGRATION NARRATIVE: IMPENDING CRISIS OR TRADITIONAL COPING STRATEGY?

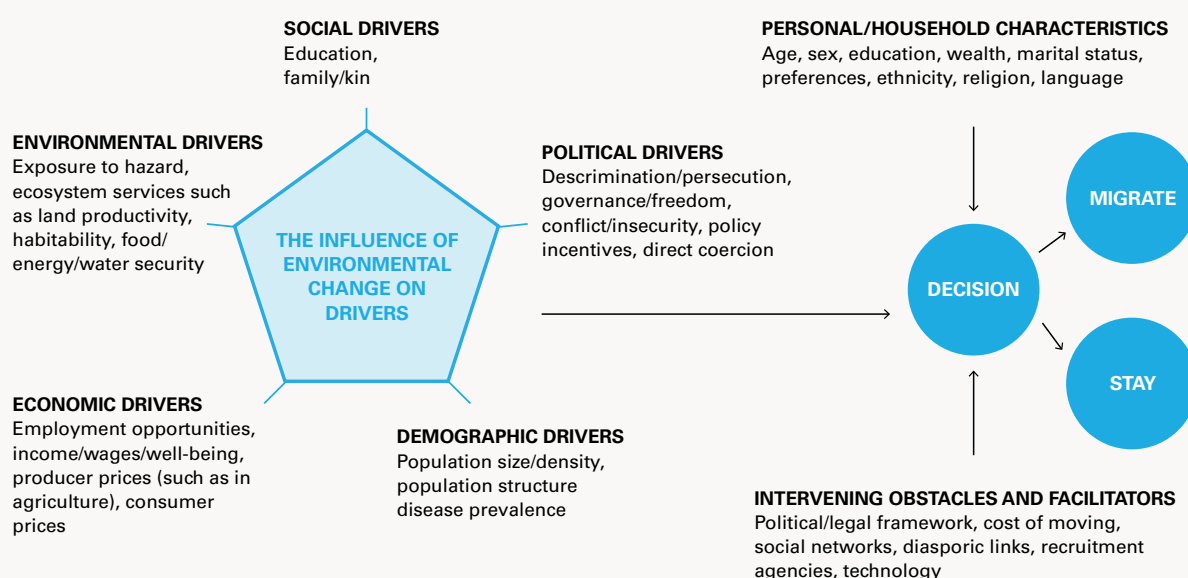


For more information see background paper: Unpacking Climate Mobility: Concepts, context, categorisations by Lucy Szaboova and Cristina Colón.

While movement of people has been happening for centuries, there has been a growing acknowledgement that the adverse impacts of climate change are increasingly contributing, directly and indirectly, to different forms of mobility that unfold within countries and across borders. However, decisions on movement are multicausal and it is extremely difficult to discern economic, environmental and other factors that shape migration decisions, making it almost impossible to determine the exact numbers of people who move as a direct result of environmental change.

**Forecasts and estimates:** Although it is not possible to determine and predict the exact number of those who move due to climate change, alarmist predictions of a climate migration crisis have proliferated in the current public and policy discourse. They not only overestimate the numbers that will move due to climate change but contribute to unhelpful narratives about migration as a security threat.

FIGURE 2: DRIVERS OF MIGRATION



Source: Black, R., Bennett, S., Thomas, S. and Beddington, J. (2011). "Climate Change: Migration as adaptation", *Nature*, 478, pp. 477–479.





Recent examples include: the Institute of Economics and Peace's [Ecological Threat Register 2020](#), which suggests that nearly 1.2 billion people will become displaced due to ecological threats by 2050; and claims that [air pollution will lead to mass migration](#) following the landmark ruling by French courts that intercepted the deportation of a Bangladeshi man citing poor air quality in his native city, Dhaka.

“Numbers which are inaccurate don’t lead to policy change and are not helping to engage policymakers with community members about problem solving.”

Robin Bronen,  
Alaska Institute for Justice

**Language and terminology** used to describe those moving due to environmental threats are instrumental in framing perceptions and discourse about climate-related mobility. For example, the terms ‘**climate or environmental migrant**’ and ‘**climate or environmental refugee**’ are increasingly used to describe populations who become displaced due to climate-induced disasters, those who leave areas where livelihoods are no longer viable due to slow-onset climate impacts such as drought and those who must leave because their land becomes uninhabitable such as in sea-level rise.

However, such terms do not do justice to the complexity of the issue, for example, the reasons for movement and/or the type of movement. In fact, while they bring attention to an important issue that is affecting some of the most vulnerable groups globally, they can also contribute to reductionist and simplified narratives that can potentially mislead and do more harm than help. For example, using language and categorisations such as ‘climate refugees’ frames those who move as victims, forced to flee their countries, such as in times of war or persecution, and does not capture those who merely move within country borders for environmental reasons. Yet most climate-driven mobility actually takes place at the country or regional level.

### In focus: [Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration](#)

This landmark report, commissioned by the World Bank and published in 2018, focuses on three regions – sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America – that together represent 55 per cent of the developing world's population. The report highlights that most climate-driven migration occurs within country borders or at the regional level. This trend is also confirmed by the 2017 [UN Report on International Migration](#), which states that in 2017 there were 258 million international migrants who primarily moved to countries within the same world region as their country of origin. Over half of all international migrants fell into this category.

After modelling different climate and mobility scenarios, Groundswell authors concluded that without concrete climate and development action, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America could witness as many as 140 million people moving within their own countries to escape the slow-onset impacts of climate change. This finding also has implications for children's current and future mobility patterns. Recent data shows that the bulk of child migrants can be found in Africa and Asia, which are hosting [three out of five migrant children](#).

“As a journalist, these issues around language are very important to us. What words we're using and how that can shape these debates... what people are reading and learning about these issues.”

**Teresa Welsh,**  
Devex

**The role of media:** Headlines forecasting the imminent invasion of migrants on the shores of Europe and the US shape public perceptions on migrants and/or refugees negatively. The media play an important role in framing what people are learning about these issues and thus shaping public attitudes about migrants and/or refugees. Sensationalist language and messaging used by some media outlets is particularly problematic where children are concerned as it distracts from the practical challenge of upholding child rights. Children are particularly vulnerable in the context of climate-related migration and displacement and often lack agency to decide whether or not to move.

As a result of these impending climate migration exodus stories, the media has received criticism for simplifying this complexity and focusing on headline figures and top-line findings, without providing background context and nuanced information about the complexity of climate-driven mobility: why people are moving or not moving, where they actually go and what happens once they are there. Numbers taken out of context create more confusion and do not lead to policy change that is focused on the root of the problem.

Participants acknowledged that there is more that can be done to: 1) more accurately portray where people are moving (both to and from); 2) explore the benefits that migrants can have on communities; and 3) prepare so that people on the move are able to integrate themselves safely and positively into new areas.

## Key takeaways

- > A reductionist and oversimplified portrayal of climate-related mobility misses some of the most important facets of the issue, which have significant ramifications for policy.
- > It is important not to see the climate and mobility (and conflict) nexus as a linear model of causation – climate science shows that uncertainty and unpredictability inherent to climate change will make it ever more difficult to predict and plan for future climate manifestations, and human mobility responses will also likely become increasingly non-linear. We need to engage with this complexity and feedbacks between climate, environment and human systems.
- > Context matters: not just geographic and climate context, but also that of mobility – different policies will be required in the context of migration as adaptation and in the context of involuntary mobility and displacement.
- > Those who move due to climate impacts are not a homogenous group of ‘climate migrants’, but are diverse, with different vulnerabilities, needs and abilities, requiring different levels or types of protection and support.

### In focus: When climate and conflict collide (by Anna Azaryeva Valente and Regev Ben Jacob, UNICEF)

Research<sup>1</sup> shows that the interrelationship between climate, migration and conflict is multiple, complex and context specific. Their reciprocal impacts can be summarised under three key domains:

**Increasing vulnerability of populations:** Climate change can significantly contribute to the vulnerability of populations, especially children, living in fragile and conflict situations. Similarly, experience of conflict increases vulnerability to climate-related disasters by eroding community resilience, affecting trust, willingness to collaborate and the capacity of institutions to cope with, anticipate and lower the risks of climate change.

**Climate change and fragility:** Climate change intersects with the broader grievances and institutional weaknesses that are at the root of fragility and

different types of conflict, affecting trust and legitimacy in institutions unable to effectively manage increasing tensions.

**Climate-related migration, social tensions and violence:** While migration presents an opportunity to adapt to climate change, it can also come with challenges as migrants may face exclusion, violence and hostility, including in contexts where populations are already affected by scarcity, marginalization and conflict. For children, this means greater risk of dropping out of school, greater risk of teenage pregnancy and juvenile crime, incomplete citizenship rights, difficult access to social services and the danger of social exclusion. Conflicts, aggravated by climate change, and heightened climate vulnerabilities due to conflict can lead to increased migration, displacement and other forms of humanitarian crisis.



## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN AND CLIMATE-INDUCED MOBILITY?



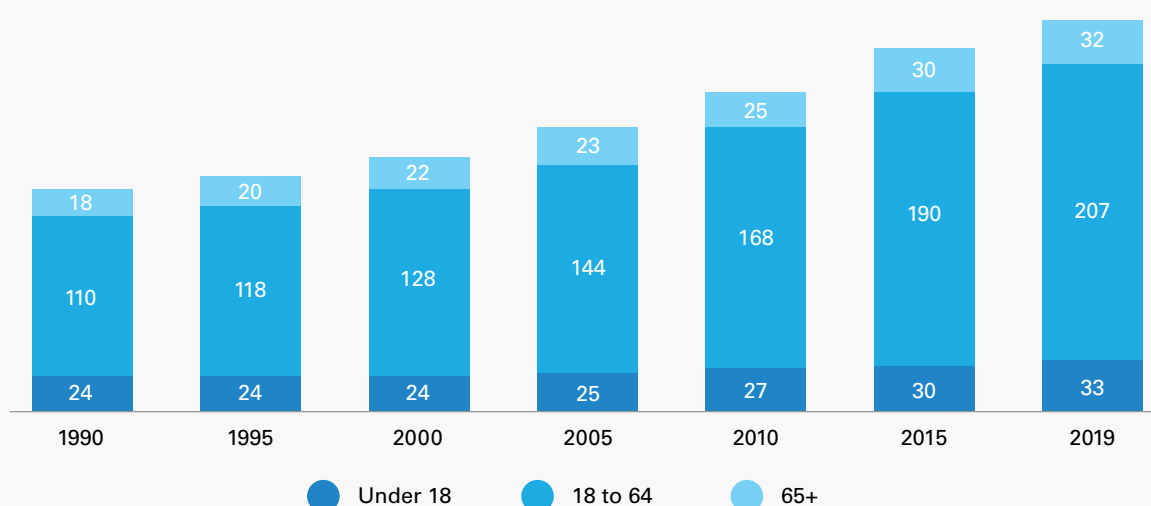
For more on specifics of children's mobility see IOM's and Plan International's background paper: [Children on the Move. Why, Where, How?](#)

While children and young people are least responsible for climate change, they are among the most vulnerable to its effects. Many of them are compelled to move or are forcibly displaced every year. While we have a lot of evidence about migration patterns of children and young people (see below), "the specific vulnerabilities of migrant children and young migrants in the context of climate change remain underexplored" according to IOM.

### Recent trends in children's mobility

Over the past three decades, there has been a steady continuous increase in the number of children on the move (Figure 3). In 2019, child migrants accounted for 14 per cent of the total migrant population and 1.5 per cent of all children globally. The number of children as a share of all international migrants is highest in Asia and Africa, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (Figure 4). When children move, they are more likely to remain within their own world region. According to the latest data, those moving to more remote destinations, such as North America or Europe, tend to be young people over the age of 18.

**FIGURE 3: THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN (IN MILLIONS) AMONG INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS**

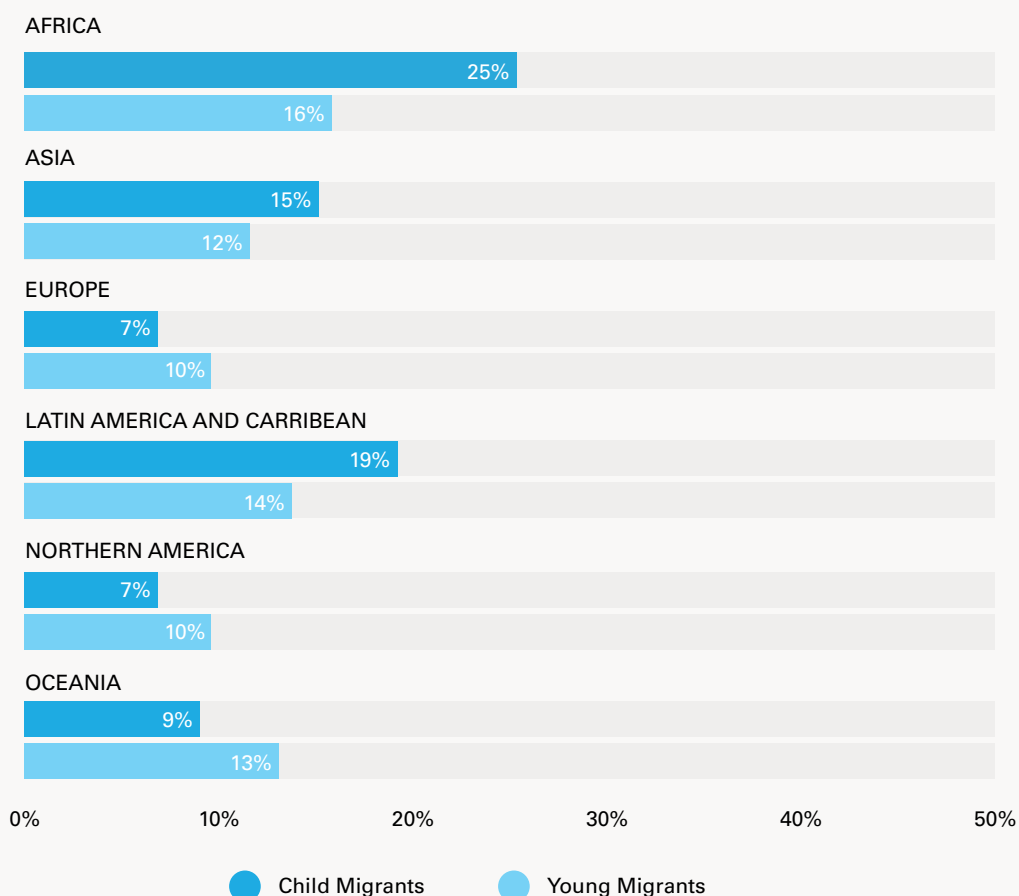


Source: [UNICEF 2020](#)

Children made up half of all registered refugees in 2018. In addition, there were 28 million internally displaced children and young people under 24 in 2019. Children who are forcibly displaced from their homes are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, child labour, poor access to services and are at risk of missing out on their education.

Children not only make up a sizeable share of people on the move globally, but extensive movements of children are occurring in areas which are particularly exposed to climate vulnerability, such as the coastal areas of South Asia, the Mekong Delta, the Horn of Africa and the Caribbean and Pacific Islands.

**FIGURE 4: CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN DIFFERENT WORLD REGIONS**



Source: [Migration Data Portal 2020](#)

## Children's climate-driven mobility

Accurate data and quality research are key to evidence-based policymaking processes. Yet, at present, there is very little empirical evidence on children whose migration or displacement is a direct or indirect result of climate change. [Research](#) by UNICEF UK, to our knowledge the only study specifically exploring children's mobility in the context of climate change, has revealed the wide-ranging and varied risks that children face in this context:

- > Displaced children and their families lose much more than shelter when forced out of an area. They lose access to health care, education, livelihoods, social services and networks, religious community, political autonomy, and the security and identity associated with a sense of home.
- > Children and young people are also among the most likely to be sent away to seek work elsewhere when climate-related events, such as intensifying drought, place untenable pressure on households.
- > Children, as some of the most vulnerable, also fall in the category of 'trapped' populations who face deteriorating conditions and worse risks than many migrants. Children are disproportionately affected among such trapped populations, since many countries experiencing the worst impacts of climate change are not only among the poorest, but also have younger populations, with children making up a larger share of the total population.
- > The vulnerability of children forced to move in response to climate impacts, combined with the ad hoc nature of their movement, leads many to living in temporary shelters and informal settlements, which often lack access to clean water, sanitation facilities and basic hygiene.

As there is very little research on children's lived experiences of mobility, or indeed immobility (voluntary or involuntary inability to move), in the context of climate change, participants agreed it was important to bridge this gap in order to answer important questions such as: How do children move? Through what channels? Where do they end up and to what extent do they enjoy protection in their destinations?



# Zoom chat

"The data need to disaggregate not only by age but also within age groups. Children are affected in numerous ways and have different needs if separated or unaccompanied minors; accompanying families; left behind by parents who migrate, etc."



**SUSAN MARTIN**  
Georgetown University

"On data and research, I think we need to balance between better systems to collect better qualitative and quantitative data relating to children on the move due to the impacts of climate change, and smaller scale specific country/regional/sub-regional studies. There remain important data gaps in humanitarian and fragile situations – such as disaggregation by age group, gender and disability."



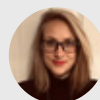
**ANNA AZARYEVA VALENTE**  
UNICEF

"Can we learn from other forms of displacement, such as conflict-induced, to have policies and programmes in place to reduce the disruption caused to children's rights? Can we strengthen systems – health, education, etc – to support children before, during and after they move? If we know this is coming, what can we do to prepare ahead of time?"



**ANJA NIELSEN**  
UNICEF UK

"...and also like loss and damage, there needs to be recognition of the social, intergenerational, gender injustices and what are governments going to do about it? – especially those with historical responsibility. We know children and future generations are likely to be on the move even more due to climate change, so decision makers have a duty to pre-empt this."



**JESSICA COOKE**  
Plan International

## INVISIBILITY OF CHILDREN IN POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS PRESENTS A PROTECTION GAP

“Significant work remains to be done to address the needs of, and include the perspectives of, particular groups such as climate-mobile children and youth,” writes Carol Farbotko in her background paper where she provides a broad overview of what’s working and what isn’t in terms of climate mobility frameworks and policies. Indeed, despite the recognition that children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, they have been almost entirely overlooked in high-level debates and policies on climate change and in particular, those on climate-related migration and displacement. Yet, multiple dimensions of children’s basic human rights are at risk when they become caught up in such mobility, including the right to education, to health and basic services.

Elizabeth Ferris highlights in her background paper, that “There is no international framework specifically focused on children who move because of the effects of climate change but there is a large body of existing law – both binding and soft law – which is applicable to children in this situation.” In fact, there is an opportunity for recognizing child migrants in policy if the intersection between the worlds of internal displacement and child rights are integrated so that states, whose responsibility is to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs), protect children as part of this group.



Best Practices for Addressing Legal and Policy Challenges of Climate Mobility by Carol Farbotko and Securing the Rights of Children on the Move by Elizabeth Ferris.



“We need to figure out ways of defining the specific subset of environmental migrants and not thinking about it in terms of everyone being covered, but rather those who have a well-founded fear of harm if they were returned home and their countries’ governments cannot provide them with adequate protection. So, we start narrowing the category, in order to broaden the protection.”

Susan Martin,  
Georgetown University

### What makes a 'climate' migrant?

The limitations in attributing mobility to climate change, especially where the links are indirect, and migration is seen to be driven by economic forces, has implications for governing such mobility and for defining a framework for the protection of those who move, including children and youth.

Participants identified the following considerations that are central to this challenge:

- > People often do not think of their migration as being driven by climate impacts. In particular, when it comes to slow-onset changes, mobility is often framed as labour migration. This makes it challenging to identify who should be included in frameworks designed to govern climate-related migration.
- > The importance of providing safe channels for movement to those who need them is often emphasised. As we have little data on children’s experiences of climate-related migration and displacement, our understanding of what safe channels look like for children in this context is also incomplete.
- > Children move under diverse circumstances, making policy design even more challenging. Some child movement is planned or anticipatory, whether it is for work or education, while in other cases children are forcibly displaced from their homes. Children moving with their families versus unaccompanied children face different risks and vulnerabilities during their journey.

### Where do children and young people fit in?

While there are some examples of good practice in policy (see box on Vanuatu’s approach) when it comes to governing and facilitating climate-related mobility of affected populations, children are largely missing or are mentioned only in passing. The reasons for this, as highlighted by the discussions, are many:

- > Lack of visibility in broader climate or migration policy – children are not usually considered to be a political cohort (they are not voters) so there is less incentive for policymakers to consider them in making policy decisions. As a result, children and young people are not consulted on or invited to participate in discussions and decision-making.

- > Climate change is still a blind spot in many child-related policies and vice versa. Even where there are specific child-related migration policies they do not address climate or environmental factors and where there are climate change policies, children are not mentioned. For example, the 2017 Joint General Comment on the Human Rights of Children in the Context of International Migration (by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families) does not mention climate change or disasters at all. The 2019 review of 160 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) conducted by UNICEF found that only 20 per cent of them made a specific mention of children.<sup>2</sup>
- > Policy silos are a common issue, because few organizations actually have the expertise and capacity to engage in all fora and policy processes that have relevance to the climate change, migration and child nexus. Closing the gap between existing law, policy and practice to secure the rights and protection of children who move in the context of climate change will require bringing together experiences and knowledge from the diverse fields of climate, environment, child rights, migration and development. This will involve building bridges between their respective communities of practice and associated processes.





### Good practice: Vanuatu's approach to governing climate-induced mobility

The Pacific Islands, among them Vanuatu, are already feeling the impacts of sea level rise. As their habitable area slowly continues to diminish, governments have come up with a strategy for managing the situation and for safeguarding the well-being and security of their populations. [Vanuatu's National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement](#) seeks to minimise the drivers of displacement from sudden and slow onset disasters.

Where displacement or planned relocation do take place, it seeks to minimise negative impacts on the people affected, especially on vulnerable and minority groups, including children, women, the elderly and people with disability. The policy explicitly considers the needs of children, such as access to health care, education and other services, and calls for the collection of disaggregated data on the numbers of children (as well as other vulnerable groups) implicated in climate and disaster-induced mobility.

The policy further sets out to facilitate durable solutions for displaced groups. These include help with integration in the destination setting where people have taken refuge, or assistance with return, recovery and reintegration at their places of origin. Key to the approach is close consultation with those affected – both displaced populations and their host communities – in order to ensure that they can make voluntary and informed choices and decisions. Since staying in the place of origin is not always feasible, the policy seeks to facilitate well-managed and dignified migration and to support internal migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change and disasters.



For more information on Vanuatu's approach and other examples of best practice from the Pacific region see Carol Farbotko's paper, [Best Practices for Addressing the Legal and Policy Challenges of Climate Mobility](#).



# Heard during the symposium: Integrating children and youth into the climate mobility discussion

**Children's experiences of climate-related mobility are not well understood...**

"A lot of the research that goes on at the community level is with heads of households, but that doesn't capture the distinct perspectives of children living within those households."



**JONI PEGRAM**  
Project Dryad

**...And children are largely overlooked in policy and decision-making processes...**

"Children are not thought of as a political cohort, so there is less incentive to gear policy towards children."



**KAYLY OBER**  
Refugees International

**...Where participation, in general, is still more of a rhetoric than reality...**

"Policy making is still seen as the preserve of governments, and they often take a top-down approach."



**SUSAN MARTIN**  
Georgetown University

**Understanding children's needs and experiences of climate-related mobility is crucial for policy and programming.**

"We must keep in mind that children themselves are not a homogenous group. Children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and others will all face different challenges in the migration/displacement process."



**ANJA NIELSEN**  
UNICEF UK

### Why invite children and youth to join policy debates and decisions about climate-related mobility?

"Youth are not the leaders of the future; youth are the leaders and partners of today. More hands-on involvement of children and youth from the beginning of all policy, projects and programme interventions is vital for achieving all of the 17 SDGs."



**KRISHNEIL NARAYAN**

Sustainability, Development & Climate Change Consultant

"Ensure that the rights that we are talking about not only apply to children on the move within climate change contexts but are actually known to the children, and they themselves participate and articulate those rights according to what they see is relevant, not only to their present but also to their future."



**ERICA BOWER**

Climate Change and Human Mobility Specialist

### What should their participation look like?

"Ensure that the rights that we are talking about not only apply to children on the move within climate change contexts but are actually known to the children, and they themselves participate and articulate those rights according to what they see is relevant, not only to their present but also to their future."

"Inclusiveness, in legislation and policy – not only in terms of mainstreaming children on the move because of climate change, but also ensuring that they have adequate attention, precisely because of their vulnerabilities."



**CECILIA JIMENEZ DAMARY**

UN Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs



# Recommendations for a child-centric research, policy and legal protection agenda





# Recommendations for a child-centric research, policy and legal protection agenda

Taking into account the discussions highlighted above, a number of implications and recommendations for policy were articulated by symposium attendees. These can be summarised under five themes:

## REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE AND GETTING THE LANGUAGE RIGHT IS KEY TO AFFORDING PEOPLE ON THE MOVE ADEQUATE PROTECTION AS WELL AS TO COUNTER THE THREAT PERCEPTION

“To move can also be empowering. People also make decisions, make choices to move ... It can reduce risk and increase adaptation.”

Atle Solberg,  
Platform on Disaster Displacement

- > **People’s agency in deciding whether to move or not to move should be recognized.** Instead of presenting migrants as victims and migration as a security crisis and a form of loss for those who move, the opportunities that migration presents should be acknowledged, especially when it is an act of choice (e.g. aspirational migration, education opportunities). These opportunities are not only there for migrants who benefit from improved opportunities and access to services, but also for host communities who can fill an existing gap in their labour markets, as well as benefit from the knowledge and skills that migrants bring with them.
- > **Not all movement is bad and it can, in fact, be empowering.** In some contexts, it can also contribute to shifting gender norms and reducing power asymmetries – for example, where women migrate, and men take over some of the traditionally female chores.
- > **The complexity of climate-related mobility needs to be considered and understood.** Disaggregation of factors affecting mobility is key to addressing the existing conflation of types of mobility (domestic vs international, migration vs displacement) and different types of climate impacts (slow vs fast onset) – this conflation becomes problematic when we try to bring about effective mechanisms for the protection of those who move.
- > **There is no one size fits all approach.** This is exemplified by the fact that the same climate change manifestation can have different impacts and implications when it takes place in different geographic settings – for example, sea level rise in coastal Bangladesh compared to the Pacific. These might require different mobility responses and as such different policy responses too: in Bangladesh, migration to cities; in the Pacific, permanent relocation to other islands or even other countries.

- > **Catch-all labels such as ‘climate refugees’ or ‘environmental migrants’ are limiting and unhelpful.** We should also consider the social units that are encapsulated within these. We should be looking at who is moving, and whether they are entire households, families or communities, or individuals, including unaccompanied children. These will have important ramifications for policy.
- > **Exploring intersections can help with the design of more effective policies** by helping us identify groups with different levels of vulnerability requiring different types and levels of protection or intervention. It can be used as a lens for understanding how climate change interacts with other factors shaping (im)mobility (such as existing vulnerability, conflict, COVID-19), and how social, economic and environmental dimensions of vulnerability are experienced by different groups, such as women, children, ethnic minorities, among others.

## UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN’S SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES OF CLIMATE-RELATED (IM)MOBILITY

- > **In order to develop effective policy responses, we need more information, data and research on children and climate (im)mobility.** For example, in looking at the difference between sudden and slow-onset events with regard to children’s mobility, some of the questions we could be asking include: What is the nature of climate events that trigger children’s mobility? Where do these children live? Who do they move with? What risks are they facing and what contributions are they making in their destination? In addition, it is also vital that we engage with children who are left behind by migrant parents.
- > **Research efforts should be accompanied by developing child-friendly research methods and approaches to data collection.** When designing and carrying out new research with children, we need to appreciate the diverse characteristics of this demographic (e.g. ethnicity, religion, disability, different age ranges), because they will likely have implications for how climate impacts and associated mobilities are experienced. Different groups of children will have different capacities, different vulnerabilities and will need different types of support during their journey. Children’s existing vulnerabilities are often exacerbated by climate change and/or displacement.

## MAKING EXISTING FRAMEWORKS FIT FOR CHILDREN

"Do we really need more policy frameworks? ... Instead of creating new ones, maybe we need to build upon existing national and regional tools and best practices and enhance what's already out there ... Integrating the voices and the concerns of children and youth into already existing policy frameworks could be an appropriate approach."

Juan Carlos Mendez,  
Platform on Disaster Displacement

- > **Children's climate mobility frameworks should build on existing migration frameworks.** This entails adapting existing mobility frameworks to make them fit for purpose for children, as well as building on existing good practice and applying lessons from these to develop a set of guidelines for the protection of children on the move. For example, building on existing regional initiatives such as Bangladesh's Climate Resilient and Migrant Friendly Towns initiative, the Caribbean Migration Consultation, or the Kampala mechanisms in Africa.
- > **Existing mechanisms also need to be expanded to offer protection to those who move due to climate change impacts** (e.g. the refugee convention definition). This process will also involve addressing existing policy silos and developing more holistic and integrated policies that draw on different areas, such as labour migration policies, humanitarian policies, refugee and asylum processes and mechanisms.
- > **Develop guiding principles for children on the move, due to climate change.** This can be done, by building on the experience and process of developing the Guiding Principles on Displacement, where lawyers

### Best practice: Climate-Resilient and Migrant-Friendly Towns: Reflections from Saleemul Huq (International Center for Climate Change and Development - ICCCAD, Bangladesh)

There are two halves to this. The climate resilient half is about infrastructure, building the towns to be less susceptible to floods or droughts or cyclones or whatever the climate impacts that they are vulnerable to. [...] The other half, which is the migrant-friendly half, is about culture and psychology, about the populations, the host population versus the migrant population. [...] Because one of the big problems with migrants and host populations always, everywhere, is some level of hostility between the host population and the migrant population. How does one overcome that and enable the host population in the towns to accept the incoming population as having rights and responsibilities and see them as equal citizens? Education is a very good way to do that, and we

are trying to explore how we can do this by having young people come and study in these towns.

What we are looking at is providing education facilities at the high school and college level in these towns, both for girls as well as for boys, so that the people who are living in the fragile or vulnerable coastal zones can send their kids to these other towns to study. [...] Studying in a town or a village is traditionally a very good way for migrants to become citizens. It effectively becomes a pathway to citizenship. [...] It's a combination of local government national government, NGOs, educational establishments, all trying to work together in what one might call a whole-of-society approach [...] very much a participatory exercise.

examined existing international law, selected relevant sections and published them as separate guiding principles. Additional building blocks are found in guidelines already promulgated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others on the protection of children in humanitarian/refugee situations, particularly the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and the IASC Guidelines for Child-Friendly Spaces. These can form a compilation of good practices from different contexts and regions focusing on actual implementation of the guiding principles, rather than merely presenting the principles that exist on paper.

- > **Moving from policy to practice.** Having guiding principles is only useful if governments are committed to using them. An opportunity for narrowing the policy-implementation gap lies in working with case workers and other stakeholders who are directly engaged with communities, including children, and who interpret policy principles for practical implementation. How can we move forward on this? By working with practitioners to understand the challenges of translating

### Good practice: Developing a toolbox for planned relocations

The toolbox was developed by Georgetown University, UNHCR and IOM, and is intended to complement the Guidance for Protecting People from Disasters and Environmental Change through Planned Relocations. It aims to provide States with concrete suggestions for planning and executing planned relocation. The toolbox presents numerous case studies of relocations that have taken place in a diversity of geographic settings.

Based on lessons from prior relocation experiences, it identifies five cross-cutting areas: an appropriate legal framework; the impact of relocation on affected populations; the information, consultation and participation of affected populations; the complexity of land issues; and the need to ensure accountability through monitoring and evaluation. These five areas should be considered at all three stages of the relocation process: the decision, planning and implementation.





policy into practice, understanding potential solutions, and learning from existing compilations that showcase ways in which particular policies or guidelines have been implemented in different geographic and climate change contexts (e.g. those in the [Relocation Toolbox](#) or those who have operated under the [Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement](#)).

## INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ENTAILS INVOLVING MANY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

“A policy looks nice on paper, but how do you make sure that you meet your policy objectives and create mechanisms for the participation of people?”

Albert Kraller,  
Danube University Krems

- > **Inclusive policymaking processes where children and youth can meaningfully participate and contribute to the discussions and decisions affecting them as well as solutions to be considered are the bare minimum.** However, as was highlighted especially by some of the younger participants in the group, children and young people from low-income, climate vulnerable and marginalized communities, including those who are currently refugees and displaced, need to also be represented with innovative opportunities to engage for those who do not have the means to participate at international and regional fora.
- > **Mainstreaming the needs of children and youth does not equal participation.** Opportunities for actual engagement in the conversations and decision-making process are necessary. For example, Peru is developing a national plan on forced migration and climate change, in a process that includes consultation exercises and discussions with indigenous communities.
- > **Youth activism can ensure youth voices are heard, even if not through official channels, and can elevate their visibility for policy changes.** The #FridaysForFuture climate marches of 2019 and 2020 are prime examples of how youth activism can bring attention to their hopes and demands. Similar initiatives that originate from the grassroots can also have the potential to influence high-level policy.

## Perspective: The inclusion of children and youth in policy debates

Representatives from United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY) proposed a number of possible solutions for the enhanced engagement of children and young people in debates about climate change and related mobilities:

“First and foremost, increasing youth participation in policymaking and high-level discussions is vital to ensure that the policies are reflective of youth and children's needs and rights. Secondly, decisions should be based on youth priorities, such as ensuring reliable migration pathways and options for safe mobility. Finally, building on some youth initiatives such as the work of [Climate Cardinals](#), policymakers and high-level organizations should translate climate change information into non-UN and less widely spoken languages. This would represent a shift towards decolonisation of discussions when speaking about climate change and youth.

There is a need to include the voices of those most affected by climate change, including and

especially persons in the Global South or who would otherwise be excluded from - if not unaware of - the conversation. Through partnerships with universities and grass roots organizations, there can be a substantial and meaningful shift towards youth as agents of change. Youth priorities can meaningfully impact policies to look more forward and the long-term implications of policies, as they are arguably the most affected by the issues of climate change.”

### Who is UN MGCY?

UN MGCY was mandated in 1992, and since then the Group has advocated for meaningful youth participation at the UN level. With over 4,000 members and multiple focal points and areas covered, UN MGCY works to ensure youth participation in high-level discussions, by finding and sharing opportunities for youth to engage.

**TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY ACTION FOR CLIMATE MOBILITY AND CHILDREN**

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION SPACE	ACTIONS	KEY ACTORS
Harmful climate-migration myths	Reframing negative crisis narratives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight the opportunities linked to mobility</li> <li>• Review concepts and language in use</li> <li>• Engage with existing evidence, not anecdotes</li> </ul>	Researchers, media, practitioners
Simplistic portrayal of the climate and mobility connection	Engaging with the complexity and nuances of climate change and mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring intersections to understand how climate change interacts with other mobility drivers</li> <li>• Recognise contextual differences with regard to climate impacts and mobility options</li> <li>• Recognise the heterogeneity of affected groups, including children</li> </ul>	Researchers, policymakers, media, practitioners
Data and information gap on children's mobility	Undertaking research specifically for and with children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let children tell their stories and lived experiences</li> <li>• Develop child-centric methods and approaches</li> </ul>	Researchers, organization commissioning research (e.g. UNICEF, Save the Children)
Children as the missing link in policy	Explicitly acknowledging children's needs and unique circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider children in climate and/or migration policy</li> <li>• Build on existing good practice, legal and policy frameworks</li> <li>• Narrow the gap between policy and implementation on the ground</li> <li>• Address policy silos</li> </ul>	Policymakers, researchers, practitioners
Children's lack of voice and representation in policy decisions	Improving the participation of children in all stages of policymaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create inclusive platforms for children's (and other groups') participation</li> <li>• Use innovative and creative approaches to lobby policy</li> </ul>	Policymakers, grassroots organizations, civil society organizations, researchers



# Conclusions and next steps





# Conclusions and next steps

As next steps, the group agreed to become a community of practice/ network to continue the conversations that were initiated over these two days. The group identified a set of actions across three areas – research, policy and programming – to move forward with this agenda.

## RESEARCH

- > **A joint research agenda** – between children’s organizations and researchers to fill existing knowledge, information and data gaps, including on children who are left behind or cannot move out of harm’s way, to be able to develop policy that can respond to the needs of children who are caught up in different forms of mobility, whether in response to slow or sudden onset climate change events. More information on the differentiated experiences of all groups of children is needed to formulate appropriate policy.
- > **A compilation of principles and good practices** – from different climate and geographic contexts can form the basis of guidelines. The case studies of real-life experiences would focus on the actual implementation of existing principles and mechanisms on the ground and highlight transferable lessons for children’s climate-related mobility.

## POLICY

- > **Developing a set of guiding principles for children on the move due to climate change.** Guidance must take into account all stages of mobility, before, during and after it occurs, as well as identify the specific needs of children during these different phases. Relevant legal and policy tools that can be applied to or adapted for the protection of children are essential policy instruments. In addition, although guidelines are non-binding, they can be a powerful lobbying and awareness-raising tool to inspire action.

## PROGRAMMING

- > **Ensuring children on the move and those at risk of climate displacement are central to preparedness, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and efforts to build resilience.** Conduct awareness building regarding climate change impacts to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to respond to the risks they are facing. Develop practical skills training to foster preparedness for climate change impacts – for

example by developing climate-smart agricultural livelihoods in rural areas impacted by climate change, as well as ensuring that specific risks migrant and displaced children may face are considered in national and local DRR policies and plans.

> **Strengthening local/national service delivery systems – health/nutrition, education, WASH Child Protection and Social Protection.**

A healthy, educated child with access to basic services and safety nets is less vulnerable and more able to deal with the impacts of climate change. This includes working with Best Interest Determinations case workers to increase their awareness on climate and environmental impacts on children.

> **Advocating for climate finance for children's and youth initiatives.**

Ensuring that climate finance is available for specific child-relevant initiatives including those that are child and youth led should be a priority. In particular, channelling funds to adaptation initiatives which include traditionally child-sensitive sectors such as water, health, education, rather than only focusing on mitigation is an important starting point. Additionally, it is important to assist governments to develop national budget allocations that benefit children.

# Appendix: Symposium agenda and participants, 3–4 November 2020

## OVERVIEW

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Migration Agency (IOM) are jointly hosting a virtual symposium in order to better understand how children and young people are affected by climate-related migration and displacement and to enhance their visibility in the public policy discourse. The symposium will outline a future agenda for integrating children's needs and rights into evolving policy discussions and future legal frameworks on this topic.

## DAY ONE

### Session 1

Concepts, context and categorisations: Unpacking climate-induced mobility

### Session 2

Current state of policy: Identifying and addressing challenges

### Session 3

Children on the move: Why, where, how

## DAY TWO

### Session 4

Opportunities for policy reform: Securing the rights and protection of children on the move

### Session 5

The role of children and young people in driving change and creating solutions

### Session 6

Setting an agenda for future policies, programming and action



## AGENDA

### DAY ONE: TUESDAY, 3 NOVEMBER

8 a.m.–8:15 a.m.	Opening	
8:15 a.m.–9:15 a.m.	<p><b>Session 1</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Concepts, context and categorisations: Unpacking climate-induced mobility</b></p> <p>Exploring key terms, their meanings and implications in the climate-migration nexus</p> <p>Breakout 1: Climate-mobility narrative</p> <p>Breakout 2: Climate, conflict and migration</p>	<p><b>Moderators</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Cristina Colon</b> Environment Policy Specialist at UNICEF</p> <p><b>Teresa Welsh</b> Journalist at Devex</p> <p><b>Anna Azaryeva</b> Peacebuilding and Fragility Specialist at UNICEF</p> <p><b>Presenter</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Lucy Szaboova</b> Research Fellow at the University of Exeter</p> <p><b>Discussants</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Kanta Kumari Rigaud</b> Lead Environmental Specialist at the World Bank</p> <p><b>Robin Bronen</b> Executive Director of the Alaska Institute for Justice</p> <p><b>Atle Solberg</b> Head of Secretariat, Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD)</p>
9:15 a.m.–9:30 a.m.	15 minute break	
9:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.	<p><b>Session 2</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Current state of policy: Identifying and addressing challenges</b></p> <p>Reviewing existing arrangements and conventions; discussing how they may help achieve protection for children displaced by climate threats, as well as hearing from panelists who will share lessons to be learned from existing climate and migration policies</p>	<p><b>Moderator</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Sanjula Weerasinghe</b> Non-resident fellow at Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University</p> <p><b>Presenter</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Carol Farbotko</b> University of the Sunshine Coast</p> <p><b>Discussants</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Tammy Tabe</b> Assistant Lecturer at the University of the South Pacific</p> <p><b>Saleemul Huq</b> Director at International Centre for Climate Change and Development in Bangladesh</p> <p><b>Susan Martin</b> Donald G. Herzberg Professor Emerita in International Migration at Georgetown University</p> <p><b>Albert Kraler</b> Co-Director at the Centre for Migration and Globalization Research, Danube University Krems</p> <p><b>Juan Carlos Mendez</b> Regional Adviser at the Platform on Disaster Displacement</p>

10:45 a.m.–11:45 a.m.	<p><b>Session 3</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Children on the move: Why, where, how</b></p> <p>Panel discussion reviewing what we already know about children’s mobility in the context of climate change and environmental hazards, as well as identify who is missing from this story and where there are gaps in knowledge</p>	<p><b>Moderator</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Cristina Colon</b> Environment Policy Specialist at UNICEF</p> <p><b>Presenter</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Mariam Traore Chazalnoël</b> Senior Expert in Migration, Environment and Climate Change at IOM</p> <p><b>Discussants</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Robert Oakes</b> Senior Researcher on Environment and Migration at the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security</p> <p><b>Joni Pegram</b> Director of Project Dryad</p> <p><b>Abdul Salam Dharejo</b> Pakistan Country Coordinator for Terre Des Hommes</p>
11:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Closing	

## DAY TWO: WEDNESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER

8 a.m.–8:05 a.m.	Opening	
8:05 a.m.–9:05 a.m.	<p><b>Session 4</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Opportunities for policy reform: Securing the rights and protection of children on the move</b></p> <p>Examining how to integrate child rights into migration, environmental policy and governance frameworks; considering what institutional and legal changes will be needed to afford legal protection to those who are displaced due to environmental hazards and climate change</p>	<p><b>Moderator</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Jasmina Byrne</b> Chief of Policy at UNICEF</p> <p><b>Presenter</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Elizabeth Ferris</b> Research Professor at the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service</p> <p><b>Discussants</b></p> <p>—</p> <p><b>Kayly Ober</b> Senior Advocate in the Climate Displacement Program at Refugees International</p> <p><b>Cecilia Jimenez-Damary</b> Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons at the UN</p>
9:05 a.m.–9:10 a.m.	5 minute break	



<p><b>9:10 a.m.–10:20 a.m.</b></p>	<p><b>Session 5</b> — <b>The role of children and young people in driving change and creating solutions</b></p> <p>Panel discussion bringing in the voices of youth climate activities and highlighting opportunities for children and young people’s further participation in policy discussions</p>	<p><b>Moderator</b> — <b>Kyle Heitmann</b> Climate Change Migration Focal Point at UN Major Group on Children and Youth</p> <p><b>Presenter</b> — <b>Anjuli Moll</b> Focal Point for Human Trafficking and Child Detention at UN Major Group on Children and Youth</p> <p><b>Discussants</b> — <b>Giula Manccini Pinheiro</b> Member of RESAMA, the Latin American climate migration group</p> <p><b>Sophia Kianni</b> Youth advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the issue of climate migration</p> <p><b>Mohammad Aman Akrami</b> Lecturer at Tabesh University in Afghanistan</p> <p><b>Chiara Scissa</b> PhD student at Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies</p> <p><b>Mahmudol Hasan Rocky</b> Research Coordinator at the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)</p> <p><b>Irfan Ullah</b> Regional Focal Point for South and Central Asia at UN Major Group on Children and Youth</p>
<p><b>10:30 a.m.–11:45 a.m.</b></p>	<p><b>Session 6</b> — <b>Setting an agenda for future policies, programming and action</b></p> <p>Building on the Symposium discussions, identifying key priority actions to protect and empower children and youth uprooted by climate change, focusing on the following areas:</p> <p>Breakout 1: Preventing and minimizing the risk of forced displacement</p> <p>Breakout 2: Education and skills for children and young people who move</p> <p>Breakout 3: Safe and legal pathways for families and youth uprooted by climate change</p>	<p><b>Moderator</b> — <b>Nicholas Rees</b> Policy Specialist at UNICEF, with a focus on climate change and economic analysis</p> <p><b>Presenter</b> — <b>Laura Healy</b> Policy Specialist at UNICEF with a focus on migration and displacement</p>
<p><b>11:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.</b></p>	<p><b>Closing</b></p>	

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

### **Anna Azaryeva Valente**

Peacebuilding and Fragility Specialist, UNICEF

### **Regev Ben Jacob**

Peacebuilding and Fragility Specialist, UNICEF

### **Juliette Benet**

Monitoring Expert – Data and Analysis, Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, Norwegian Refugee Council

### **Jonas Bergmann**

Doctoral researcher, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research

### **Lucia Bernardo Fernandez**

Migration Officer, DEVCO - European Commission

### **Kate Botterill**

Lecturer in Human Geography, University of Glasgow

### **Erica Bower**

Doctoral Researcher, Stanford University

### **Sabine Brickenkamp**

Policy Officer, DG DEVCO

### **Robin Bronen**

Executive Director, Alaska Institute for Justice

### **Jasmina Byrne**

Chief of Policy, Office of Global Insight & Policy, UNICEF

### **Adrián Calvo-Valderrama**

Senior Monitoring Coordinator, Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, Norwegian Refugee Council

### **Christelle Cazabat**

Research Manager, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

### **Laurence Chandy**

Director, Office of Global Insight & Policy, UNICEF

### **Cristina Colon**

Policy Specialist – Environment, Office of Global Insight & Policy, UNICEF

### **Jessica Cooke**

Climate Change Policy and Advocacy Adviser, Plan International

### **Abdul Dharejo**

Country Coordinator, Pakistan, Terre Des Hommes Germany

### **Iulia Duca**

Consultant – Migration, Environment and Climate Change, IOM

### **Carol Farbotko**

Research Scientist, CSIRO

### **Adrian Fernandez-Dickmanns**

Trainee, European Commission

### **Elizabeth Ferris**

Research Professor, Georgetown University

### **Francois Gemenne**

Director, Hugo Observatory

### **Fatoumata Haidara**

Sahel Director, Plan International

### **Laura Healy**

Policy Specialist, Migration and Displacement, UNICEF

### **Kyle Heitmann**

Climate Change Migration Focal Point, UN MGCY

### **Ineke Hordijk**

Policy Officer, European Union

### **Cindy Huang**

Vice President of Strategic Outreach, Refugees International

### **Saleemul Huq**

Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development

### **Cecilia Jimenez-Damary**

Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs, United Nations

### **Avidan Kent**

Associate Professor, University of East Anglia

### **Tim Kilbourn**

Counsellor (Migration) Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations

### **Stern Kita**

National Project Manager, UN Habitat

### **John Knox**

Professor of Law, Wake Forest University

### **Albert Kraler**

Co-Director at the Centre for Migration and Globalization Research, Danube University Krems

### **Claire Kumar**

Senior Research Fellow, Human Mobility Initiative, Overseas Development Institute

**Susan Martin**

Donald G. Hertzberg Professor  
Emerita in International  
Migration, Georgetown  
University

**Aimee-Noel Mbiyozo**

Senior Migration Researcher,  
Institute for Security Studies,  
University of Cape Town

**Isabelle Michal**

Protection Officer – climate  
change and disaster  
displacement, UNHCR

**Anjuli Moll**

Lead protection of migrants,  
focal point, UN MGCY

**Anja Nielsen**

Senior Policy Adviser,  
UK National Committee for  
UNICEF

**Robert Oakes**

Senior Researcher, Environment  
and Migration, United  
Nations University Institute  
for Environment and Human  
Security

**Kayly Ober**

Senior Advocate, Climate  
Displacement Program,  
Refugees International

**Joni Pegram**

Director, Project Dryad

**Luke Pye**

Associate Project Officer,  
UNESCO

**Nicholas Rees**

Programme Specialist, UNICEF

**Jose Riera-Cezanne**

Adjunct Professor, University for  
Peace

**Kanta Rigaud**

Lead Environmental Specialist,  
World Bank

**Chiara Scissa**

PhD student at Sant'Anna School  
of Advanced Studies

**Harjeet Singh**

Global Climate Lead, ActionAid  
International

**Atle Solberg**

Head of Secretariat, Platform on  
Disaster Displacement

**Tammy Tabbe**

Lecturer, The University of the  
South Pacific

**Iben Villumsen**

Policy Officer, EU Delegation to  
the UN in Geneva

**Sanjula Weerasinghe**

Non-resident Fellow, Institute  
for the Study of International  
Migration, Georgetown University

**Teresa Welsh**

Journalist, Devex

**Michelle Yonetani**

Senior Policy Officer, Climate  
Action, UNHCR

**ENDNOTES**

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UNICEF works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents — and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Across 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive and fulfill their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. And we never give up.