



LITTLE KIDS, BIG MOVES

Early Childhood Development and Climate Mobility

ECDAN Knowledge Fellows
program project

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Abbreviations

ECD	Early childhood development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
ECE	Early childhood education
EWS	Early warning system
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the report. To provide a common understanding of their meaning for readers, definitions are included below. The definitions come from multiple sources but are stated in the author's own phrasing.

Adaptation: Preparing for and adjusting to the current and expected impacts of climate change.

Children on the move: Children affected by migration or displacement, either within their own country or across borders, regardless of their legal status or reason for moving.

Climate change: Long-term shifts in average temperature and weather patterns that may be caused by natural or man-made factors, including greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate displacement: The forced movement of people as a result of sudden-onset effects of climate change (e.g., extreme weather events made worse, more frequent, or less predictable by climate change). Typically associated with short-term movement, though displacement can also be protracted or permanent.

Climate migration: The long-term movement of people as a result of slow-onset effects of climate change (e.g., drought or desertification). May exist on a spectrum ranging from more forced to more voluntary movement.

Climate mobility: An umbrella term for the impacts of climate change on whether and how people move. It includes people who are experiencing climate displacement, climate migration, planned relocation, and immobility.

Disaster risk reduction (DRR): Practices of reducing or preventing risks and loss from disasters by reducing vulnerability and promoting resilience. Examples include early warning systems, planned evacuation routes, and improved land use.

Early Childhood Development (ECD): This report adopts the definition of early childhood development as the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children from pregnancy through age eight.

Early Warning System (EWS): Systems for monitoring, predicting, and communicating threats from extreme weather and other climate-related hazards that enable individuals to prepare in advance (e.g., tsunami warnings that provide the time needed to find high ground).

Mitigation: Action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance carbon sinks to limit climate change.

Nurturing Care Framework: The framework includes five core components that support ECD that are good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning, and safety and security. These interrelated and indivisible components are required for all children to develop optimally.



Planned relocation: The permanent, voluntary movement of an entire community from one location to another with the goal of reducing vulnerability. Often supported by the government.

Slow-onset climate effects: Effects of climate change that occur gradually over time (e.g., rising temperatures, desertification, or sea level rise), which increase stress on an individual's land, food and water security, and livelihood.

Sudden-onset climate effects: Effects of climate change that occur suddenly (e.g., a storm or flood made more intense by climate change) and can cause severe destruction.

Toxic stress: Dangerous levels of prolonged and intense stress that can harm a child's cognitive development and lead to negative lifelong health impacts. Climate mobility can be a source of toxic stress for young children.



Executive Summary

All children deserve a safe and nurturing home. As families all over the world increasingly experience the effects of climate change, more and more young children and their caregivers may be forced to leave their homes to create new lives somewhere else. Young children's futures will be shaped by these journeys—the circumstances in which they move; their experiences before, during, and after the move; and the support, resources, and care they receive along the way. Policymakers have a unique opportunity to plan and future-proof our services and policies for these young children. In doing so, we can help ensure that all children can receive the nurturing care they need to build strong foundations in early childhood, no matter where home is or where it becomes.

Early childhood is a critical time of life. What happens to a child in their early years can affect the rest of their life, from their health in adulthood to their educational outcomes and income levels.¹ Climate change threatens to disrupt this crucial period for up to a billion children, making them more vulnerable to impacts ranging from food insecurity to displacement from extreme weather events.²

Those who will move because of climate change will face compounded, reinforcing risks: the risks of climate change and the risks that come with being on the move. Already, more than 24,000 children are displaced every day because of extreme weather events.³ As the slow onset effects of climate change build, millions more could migrate. By the World Bank's estimates, as many as 216 million people could experience climate migration by 2050, with the bulk of this movement happening after 2030.⁴ Some may only be away from home for a little while, while others may never return. Most will stay within their own country, but some will cross borders.⁵ Almost all will face new risks and vulnerabilities.

Through a literature review and key informant interviews with experts in climate change, early childhood development (ECD), and human mobility, this project aimed to outline current research and practices at the intersection ECD and climate mobility, elevate promising practices for addressing the needs of young children experiencing climate mobility, identify gaps in current services and planning, and provide considerations to policymakers and practitioners working with young children.

The project was focused on the following questions:

1. Are the nurturing care needs of children who will experience climate mobility different from children who will not? If so, how?
2. How can ECD services and policies best respond to the needs of young children and their caregivers experiencing climate mobility? Are there gaps in current practices?
3. What can be learned from existing innovations that seek to address the nurturing care needs of children on the move for other reasons (e.g., because of conflict)?
4. Are governments preparing for climate mobility? How can they integrate the needs of young children into their planning?

Climate mobility has the potential to impact all five core components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning, and safety



and security. These impacts range from disruptions in continuity of service provision to stigmatization, policies that prevent access to services for migrant children, language barriers, and impacted ability to pay for services.⁶ These will place a dampening effect on children's ability to access vital services, all while they face ever more urgent needs—especially mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs—as a result of both climate and mobility.⁷ Many of these children will be moving to new homes that have their own climate risks, often in urban environments, placing them at risk of secondary displacement.³

The report also explores ten promising policies and programs identified by key informants, highlighting how policymakers and practitioners can begin to meet the needs of children on the move in a changing climate. These include programs that are mobile, remote, and culturally sensitive, as well as policies that are inclusive and child friendly. Building on these promising practices, recommendations are posed for policymakers and practitioners. Policymakers should include innovative policies that enable family unity, foster child-friendly disaster risk reduction (DRR), invest in child protection efforts for children on the move, keep children engaged with key ECD services like early childhood education (ECE) and healthcare, ensure systems are resilient and future-proofed, and promote inclusive growth in the places where children will move. Practitioners should ensure programs are designed with these children in mind, able to meet them wherever they are or be taken with them, address their language and cultural needs, provide high-quality MHPSS support, and ensure that young children have access to age-appropriate knowledge and preparedness. Children will also need programs that create a sense of belonging, wherever they are from and wherever they go.

Policymakers and practitioners must begin to plan for climate mobility. Left unaddressed, children will lose access to critical services and protections and almost every element of nurturing care will be threatened. Key investments in children and families, including anti-poverty measures, may be set back by decades.² Fortunately, unlike many other forms of crisis, it is possible to plan and future-proof systems and investments. Everyone—children, caregivers, communities, and countries—will benefit from designing programs and policies with *all* children in mind, including those who will experience climate mobility.



1. Introduction

There is an urgent need for climate action. UNICEF estimates that up to one billion children, or half of all children in the world, live in countries that are at ‘extremely high risk’ from the impacts of climate change, despite contributing less than 10% of all global emissions.² A child born in 2020 may be up to *seven times* more likely to experience an extreme weather event than their grandparents, even if current emission pledges are met.⁸ Almost every single child is already exposed to at least one major climate or environmental shock or hazard, such as heatwaves, cyclones, or flooding.² These children did not create the problem, but they will suffer some of the worst effects.

There is no better, more sustainable or just solution than climate mitigation, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. At the same time, even if the global community were to achieve a dramatic reduction in emissions, the effects of climate change are already being felt and will take decades to fully reverse—if they can be reversed at all.² Beyond mitigation efforts, policymakers and practitioners need to invest in climate adaptation, anticipatory measures that will help reduce the damage caused by climate change on children’s lives and build resilience to handle future shocks.⁹

Investing in early childhood is particularly important as a climate mitigation and adaptation strategy. Early childhood is a critical time of life when brains develop faster than at any other point and early investments can yield lifelong benefits.¹ Quality foundations in early childhood can reduce stunting, improve cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development, and lead to better health outcomes.¹⁰ Because of this, investing in high-quality early childhood development (ECD) interventions can yield outsized effects, with estimated returns on investment ranging from 7-16% per year.¹⁰ The impacts of climate change and climate mobility threaten to disrupt this critical period of life, with important implications for the lifelong health and well-being of today’s young children.

Climate change has the potential to negatively impact every component of nurturing care for young children, whether or not they move. The five components of nurturing care—good health, adequate nutrition, opportunities for early learning, responsive caregiving, and safety and security—are necessary in the early years to promote healthy ECD.¹¹ These components are described in Table 1 below. Climate change will impact all aspects of children’s lives, from the food they eat and the air they breathe to the places they call home. This threatens not only children’s lives, but also the future health, prosperity, and well-being of their communities and countries.

Table 1. Key components of the Nurturing Care Framework

	Description
Good health	Good health encompasses the physical and mental health of both children and their caregivers, including childhood health, routine vaccinations, and psychosocial support.
Adequate nutrition	Adequate nutrition includes child and maternal nutrition (e.g. nutrition during pregnancy, breastfeeding, and management of childhood malnutrition).
Responsive caregiving	Responsive caregiving comprises a caregiver’s timely and appropriate response to their child’s signals, including understanding children’s hunger cues, smiling and making eye contact, and everyday communication and play between caregivers and children.

	Description
Opportunities for early learning	Opportunities for early learning consist of the interactions that children have that contribute to their brain development and foundations for later learning, including storytelling, age-appropriate play, and exploration.
Safety and security	Safety and security involve all aspects of children's environments that may pose dangers or risks, including clean water, air quality, violence and neglect, and safe play spaces.

Source: Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development. *A Closer Look at the Nurturing Care Components*. Nurturing Care Framework; 2020. <http://nurturing-care.org/nurturing-care-components>.

While it is hard to accurately estimate how many young children will experience climate mobility, the World Bank estimates that as many as 216 million people may migrate as a result of climate change by 2050, or more than 2.5% of the global population, with the bulk of migration occurring after 2030.⁴ For young children and their families, climate mobility presents unique risks as well as unique opportunities. By planning ahead, building climate-resilient, future-proofed child-sensitive systems, and designing services and policies that work for families on the move, policymakers can help protect the gains that countries have made not only in improving ECD outcomes but also in fostering inclusive development and reducing poverty.

This project aimed to outline current research and practices at the intersection of ECD and climate mobility, elevate promising practices for addressing the needs of young children experiencing climate mobility, identify gaps in current services and planning, and provide considerations to policymakers and practitioners working with young children.

The project was focused on the following questions:

1. Are the nurturing care needs of children who will experience climate mobility different from children who will not? If so, how?
2. How can ECD services and policies best respond to the needs of young children and their caregivers experiencing climate mobility? Are there gaps in current practices?
3. What can be learned from existing innovations that seek to address the nurturing care needs of children on the move for other reasons (e.g., as a result of conflict)?
4. Are governments preparing for climate mobility? How can they integrate the needs of young children into their planning?

By addressing and preparing for climate mobility, policymakers and practitioners can help ensure young children receive the early support and opportunities they deserve, regardless of where they live.

2. Methodology and Limitations

2.1 Methodology

This project included a review of the published literature on the impacts of climate change on ECD, existing practices and lessons learned from children on the move programming, and models and approaches for addressing climate mobility. Peer-reviewed literature from the past 10 years was drawn from ResearchGate and Google Scholar using a combination of mobility terms (e.g., climate mobility, displacement, migration, planned relocation, and children on the move) and terms related to ECD (e.g., early childhood, young children, and

early years). Gray literature was drawn from a range of multilateral organizations, including the World Bank, UNICEF, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM); international, regional, and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working at the intersection of climate change, migration, and/or ECD, including the Internal Displacement and Monitoring Centre and Save the Children; and key global and regional networks or their partners, including Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies, Moving Minds Alliance, and ECDAN.

To complement the literature review, 19 key informant interviews were conducted. A list of key informants is provided in [Appendix 2](#). Key informants were identified based on their professional or academic expertise in the field of ECD, climate change, or mobility. They included a range of researchers, funders, and staff from multilaterals, NGOs, and networks. Interviews were requested over email and were conducted primarily on Zoom over the course of an hour. Questions were tailored based on the informant's occupation and area of expertise. Important themes and takeaways from the key informant interviews are included in [Appendix 3](#).

Promising practices were identified by the project's key informants as examples of innovation or best practice in the fields of climate mobility or ECD for children on the move. Information from both the key informant interviews and literature review were synthesized into the report recommendations and conclusions.

2.2 Limitations

Despite the impacts that climate mobility may have on young children's lives, there is very little data and research on the impacts of climate mobility on children, and far less on young children specifically. Even getting a grasp of the scale of the issue can be a challenge. While this report references the estimates that do exist on the number of individuals who have been displaced or chosen to migrate as a result of climate change, these numbers rely on data systems that may not be complete, comparable, or resilient.¹³ When this data does exist, it is not always age-disaggregated beyond differentiating minors (under age 18) and adults.¹⁴ Nearly three in ten countries lack age-disaggregated data on those who have internationally migrated, and only 57% of data on internally displaced persons (IDPs) compiled by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is disaggregated by age.³

Additionally, the multifactorial nature of mobility can make climate mobility hard to track as a distinct phenomenon.³ For example, a family that chooses to migrate to an urban area after the slow-onset impacts of climate change affect their crop productivity and ability to make a livelihood over several years may identify themselves as economic migrants rather than climate migrants. To the extent that these families are not visible in the data, it may be underestimating the scale of those impacted by climate mobility and failing to identify and address their climate mobility-specific needs.³

Similar limitations apply to the models that estimate the potential future number of climate migrants or climate-displaced people. The models may not specifically break out the estimates by age in a way that allows young children and their caregivers to be identified, and their needs planned for. Additionally, they all include assumptions on what does—and what does not—count as climate-related or climate-induced mobility. Lastly, they rely on assumptions about our future behavior, including what mitigation actions governments and



other actors will take to address the scale of climate change. To put it simply, every model will be incomplete or skewed.

Without robust data and evidence specifically on the impacts of climate mobility and ECD, this report draws significantly on existing evidence and best practices from work with children on the move generally, including older children and children who have been displaced by conflict. As most children who experience climate mobility are anticipated to relocate within their own countries, preference is given for citing data on IDPs over refugees.

Lastly, while this project has included interviews with experts and a review of the literature, interviews with children and their caregivers were out of scope. As a result, the lived experiences and perspectives of those who will be most impacted by children's climate mobility are not fully represented in this report.

3. Climate Mobility and ECD

Climate mobility will be one of many intersecting impacts of climate change on young children's lives, impacting whether, when, where, and how individuals and families move. This report uses climate mobility as an umbrella term that encompasses the many ways in which the impacts of climate change can affect mobility, whether it results from slow or sudden-onset climate factors, whether it is forced or voluntary, internal or across borders, and whether it takes the form of displacement, migration, planned relocation, or, in certain circumstances, immobility. For an overview of climate mobility, see [Appendix 1](#).

Children experiencing climate mobility may face the combined, magnifying risks of both climate change and migration and displacement. Collectively, these risks may directly harm their health and well-being, prevent access to critical services, and exacerbate underlying vulnerabilities. Minimizing these potential negative effects on nurturing care will be critical in mitigating the impact on children, their families, and their communities.

3.1 Cross-Cutting Considerations

How well a family and community are able to respond to the consequences of climate mobility will depend on a number of factors, from their individual agency and resilience to national considerations like financing, sector planning, and proactive policymaking. These factors are cross-cutting, with the potential to impact all aspects of nurturing care.

3.1.1 Policies and Preparedness

A growing number of global frameworks touch on climate mobility in different ways but rarely center it as their primary focus, never mind deeply explore how the issue affects children's lives in particular. Key international frameworks addressing climate mobility are included in Table 2 below, as well as how they include young children and their needs, if at all. Beyond the international frameworks, some countries and regions have begun to develop their own national and regional responses to climate mobility, particularly in the Pacific Islands.¹⁵ In many others, the needs of children experiencing climate mobility are almost entirely unaddressed.

Table 2. Global legal frameworks for climate mobility

Framework	Description
Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030	Endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, the Sendai Framework is intended to guide Member States' concrete actions for DRR, including the adoption of policies and programs for those affected by disaster-induced mobility. Children are noted as important stakeholders who should be allowed to contribute to disaster risk reduction (DRR). ¹⁶
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)	The GCM is the first UN agreement that aims to address international migration in all of its forms. It includes recommendations to develop admission practices for migrants driven by both sudden- and slow-onset natural disasters, including through planned relocation where needed. It reiterates the need to make decisions in the best interest of children, account for family unity in decision-making, ensure migrant children have access to ECD and education, and establish child protection systems. ¹⁷
Global Compact for Refugees (GCR)	The GCR hopes to provide a framework for UN Member States responding to refugee situations, including addressing the needs of host communities. The role of climate change and natural disasters in displacement are acknowledged, but not a focus. Children are included as a group with special needs, additional support for ECD and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is encouraged, and investments in child protection are recommended. ¹⁸
United Nations Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement	The Action Agenda provides a vision for addressing internal displacement, including displacement caused by climate change. UN commitments include advocating for climate and anticipatory action finance, addressing displacement through UN climate change work, and ensuring displacement risks are included in DRR, climate, and urban policies. The needs of children are largely absent. ¹⁹

Source: Author's creation consolidating information from multiple sources

Whether and how a government has prioritized supportive, inclusive policies for children and families experiencing climate mobility will have a significant impact on children's ability to move safely, stay with their families, and maintain access to critical services. Governments have already invested resources into adapting to climate change and expanding access to quality services like education and healthcare. When these services exclude or fail to meet the needs of vulnerable children on the move, they are not designed for the future of climate mobility and governments risk losing much-needed returns on their investments in everything from poverty reduction to improved learning outcomes.

3.1.2 Climate Adaptation and ECD Financing

Financing is a difficult but ever-present factor underlying many decisions about climate adaptation and mobility. According to the Climate Policy Initiative, approximately US \$76 billion was mobilized to support climate adaptation in 2022, falling short of the \$212 billion per year needed by developing countries alone.²⁰ Of this climate financing, only 19% went to the least developed countries.²⁰ Adaptation financing to the least developed countries accounted for only 1% of total climate financing in 2022.²⁰ This funding goes to support a wide range of adaptation needs far beyond addressing the needs of young children experiencing climate mobility.

In existing humanitarian responses, ECD interventions are also underfunded. As of 2017, ECD interventions accounted for only 3.3% of development aid to crisis-affected countries.²¹ The majority of that already limited funding goes towards child health and nutrition programs, leaving other aspects of nurturing care like pre-primary education or MHPSS services largely unfinanced.²¹ ECD services in these contexts are critical in helping children heal, build resilience, and establish healthy foundations for the rest of their lives—and yet practitioners struggle to get enough resources to meet even a fraction of their needs.

This is a reality that policymakers and practitioners concerned with ECD and climate mobility will need to reckon with. Given both ECD and climate adaptation efforts are already so underfunded, it is unlikely that the international community will mobilize sufficient resources to meet the needs of young children on the move as a result of climate change without significant changes. A dramatic shift in how countries are approaching financing will be needed.

3.1.3 Agency and Decision-Making

Agency and resilience are critical for children experiencing climate mobility, even though they are hard to define and quantify. Children and caregivers are often excluded from decision-making and not empowered to make well-informed decisions about climate mobility. Young children may not receive age-appropriate DRR messaging or not be consulted in child-friendly ways during community conversations around planned relocation or other mobility-related issues. Caregivers may not receive timely information about when and how they need to relocate, information about the risks they may experience in different locations, or communication about how to access relevant social protection systems. Communities may not be consulted on their local and indigenous knowledge around climate risks and adaptation strategies. This can create feelings of powerlessness that can be hard to shake: while caregivers who have previously survived disasters tend to plan more for future disasters, they do not report feeling any more able to protect themselves or their families.²²

Climate Mobility, Nurturing Care, and Urbanization

Many families who will move as a result of climate change are predicted to relocate to nearby urban areas. More than half of the world already lives in urban areas, including one billion people in urban slums, with urban populations expected to double by 2050.³ Without pre-planning and investment in urban infrastructure, growing urban populations may strain existing housing stock and push families into densely crowded informal settlements. For example, as many as 70% of people living in Dhaka's slums may be climate migrants.²³ Living in these informal settlements without adequate housing and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services can increase exposure to hazards ranging from fire to extreme heat and storms.³

Overstrained urban areas may also present challenges that threaten young children's health, nutrition, and early learning opportunities. Caregivers may lack the necessary skills, connections, or access to childcare that they would need to find decent urban work, and instead rely on more risky and lower-paid work in the informal sector.³ All of this can affect nurturing care for young children, including their safety and security. On the other hand, other children and youth may find that moving to urban areas allows them greater educational opportunities, expanded access to quality services, and better food.²³ Ultimately, a lot of how young children experience urban areas will come down to how well the area has planned for and invested in child-friendly, inclusive growth.

3.2 Climate Mobility and the Nurturing Care Framework

Climate mobility can have deep implications for each component of nurturing care. Neglect or disruption to supports or services for one component will have spillover effects on the others, making it all the more important to ensure children have strong foundations in all of the areas of nurturing care.

3.2.1 Good Health

The health of young children experiencing climate mobility may be deeply affected by both the changing climate and their new circumstances. From damaged or inadequate healthcare services to legal or administrative barriers to accessing healthcare, children on the move experience several challenges to accessing the care they need. At the same time, climate change and certain types of mobility pose their own unique or exacerbated health risks that only increase the importance of accessible health services. Without access to necessary care, children's lifelong health can be negatively impacted, and public health efforts in their communities may be set back by decades.⁶

In the absence of inclusive, flexible universal health coverage, young children and their caregivers experiencing climate mobility may lose access to health services.⁶ The reasons for this are varied and can range from health infrastructure being damaged by extreme weather events to lost identification or medical records that pose administrative barriers to children and their families attempting to access care.⁶ Many families may also be unable to afford paid health services, especially given the negative impact climate change and recent mobility can have on household incomes. Even once children have access to health services, the quality of care that they receive can be negatively affected by language barriers or stigma.

The results of these barriers are clear—children on the move have lower childhood vaccination rates and worse health outcomes than their non-mobile peers on average.³ These effects can be seen even starting in pregnancy. Research in Bangladesh found that only 20% of women experiencing climate displacement received the recommended four antenatal care visits during their most recent pregnancy, compared to 40% of women who were not displaced, and were more likely to not receive any antenatal care at all.⁶ As a result, pregnant women experiencing displacement were at a higher risk of maternal mortality, their pregnancies at increased risk of complications, and their children at increased risk of illness.⁶

This is all the more troubling because access to regular healthcare can be even more important for young children experiencing climate mobility. Children under the age of five are estimated to bear close to 90% of the disease burden from climate change.³ On top of this, young children may live in crowded shelters and settlements without appropriate sanitation. One multi-country study of refugee camps and settlements found that only one in three refugees have access to appropriate WASH facilities.³ These conditions can increase the risk of measles, malaria, respiratory illnesses, vector-borne diseases, and diarrhea.^{6,24,25} This is particularly concerning as diarrhea is the leading cause of malnutrition and the second leading cause of mortality among children under age five.⁶

Mental Health and Well-being of Children

Leaving home can be stressful, disruptive, and anxiety-inducing at any age. From the journey itself and the loss of land and culture to the lack of stability and stigma,

children experiencing climate mobility—like many other children on the move—are at increased risk of toxic levels of stress and require support to help them adapt and thrive in their new homes.

Children fleeing their homes may be mourning what they have lost or afraid of what will happen next for themselves and their families.²⁶ They may experience more stress from being separated from their loved ones, what they see and how they are treated along the way, and simply from disruptions to their daily life. Research suggests that displacement may be linked to a doubling in the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, and children under the age of five are more prone to experiencing negative mental health impacts after extreme weather events than adults.⁷

Young children experiencing climate mobility may also face negative mental health impacts specific to the environmental loss and degradation of their homes. For some of these children, not only will they leave their home, but they will leave with the knowledge that they can never return. Particularly for young children from indigenous communities, loss of land may also be deeply linked to a loss of cultural practices and local knowledge.²⁷ In other circumstances, children may be separated from their elders during or after their move, further disrupting their connection to their cultural heritage and traditions.

These losses occur within the context of broader changes in routine that come with leaving home and the stability and belonging that it represents. They may also face stigma and exclusion in their new homes which can further affect birth outcomes and psychosocial distress.²⁸ Individually or combined, these effects can place children on the move at a greater risk of toxic stress, a level of intense, frequent, or prolonged stress that can affect their cognitive, physical, and psychosocial development and have lifelong consequences.^{29,30}

3.2.2 Adequate Nutrition

Climate change is already affecting food security and nutrition, with enormous impacts on nurturing care for children around the world. From direct and indirect effects on food security and quality, young children experiencing climate mobility will be at an increased risk of malnutrition and its potential lifelong impacts on physical and cognitive development.

Climate change affects access to nutritious food both directly and indirectly. A changing climate affects agricultural productivity, impacting the types, amounts, and prices of food available. As a result, the World Food Programme has estimated that malnutrition and hunger could increase by as much as 20% by 2050.³ Furthermore, the World Food Programme predicts that undernutrition will be the leading cause of climate-related mortality among children.³

Climate change-driven food insecurity will hit young children and caregivers on the move particularly hard and it will itself be a key driver of climate mobility.¹⁴ Rates of malnutrition are higher among IDP children than their non-displaced peers.³¹ This is in part because of the impact on income, which limits the quality and quantity of child-friendly foods families can afford, and in part because of the impact on living and sanitation conditions, as discussed above.³¹ Rates of diarrhea are also very high in informal and overcrowded settlements and camps, with concerning implications for children's nutrition.⁶

These impacts will be particularly felt for children in early childhood, a time when children are disproportionately affected by a lack of adequate nutrition.²⁵ Malnutrition during pregnancy or early childhood can have lifelong effects on children's healthy development, affecting health outcomes, brain development, and cognitive function.³ Malnutrition can also lead to lower educational outcomes and decreased productivity through adulthood.¹⁴

3.2.3 Responsive Caregiving

Caregivers are the cornerstone of young children's lives. When caregivers are not doing well, children's development suffers. For families experiencing climate mobility, caregivers are also experiencing profound disruptions. From the possibility of family separation to the trickle-down effects on caregiver mental health, children and their caregivers will face several challenges to consistent, responsive caregiving.

In some circumstances, children and their caregivers may be separated as a result of climate mobility, either permanently or temporarily.³ At times, children experiencing natural disasters may lose family as a result. Other times, families may decide the best way to cope with slow or sudden-onset climate impacts is to separate.³ This may take the form of young children staying behind with one caregiver while the other migrates, for example staying with their mother while their father moves to a nearby urban area or goes to find seasonal work elsewhere.³ It can also take the form of both parents moving while a child stays behind with extended family. In any case, being separated from their caregivers can be a profoundly stressful event for a young child.

Even children who stay with their caregivers may be separated from their extended family and support networks, which can be scary and disorienting at any age—particularly when coupled with a fear for that loved one's well-being. This separation can negatively affect mental health outcomes for both children and their caregivers.⁷ These effects are likely to be particularly felt by young children, who are at increased risk from toxic stress after an extreme weather event.⁷

It is hard to be a responsive caregiver in frightening and stressful circumstances, whether that is an extreme weather event, a harrowing journey, loss of livelihood and home, or just the daily stressors of establishing a new life in a new place.³² When caregivers themselves experience significant, chronic stress, they may not be able to be responsive, positive caregivers for their children.³² For young children who rely on their caregivers as their primary source of comfort and support, this can have trickle-down effects on their mental health.⁷ This can be particularly true for young children without access to other trusted adults like teachers or healthcare workers—and in the context of climate mobility, children may either lose access to these adults or the adults may also be experiencing acute distress.⁷

3.2.4 Opportunities for Early Learning

Early stimulation and learning set the foundations for children's learning throughout their lives. The skills children gain in early childhood—from early literacy and numeracy to social-emotional learning—can lead to better outcomes through primary and secondary education and into adulthood. Unfortunately, climate mobility can affect children's early learning in a number of ways, from disrupted access and continuity during their move to policy barriers that keep them from being able to enroll or re-enroll in their receiving community. Once in the classroom, children may still face social and language barriers to their learning.



Moving to a new place can pose new barriers and new opportunities to early childhood education (ECE). On average, displaced children have less access to education than their peers.¹⁴ Close to half of school-age refugee children are estimated to be out of school.³ Pre-primary enrollment rates among refugees are particularly low: UNHCR estimates gross enrollment rates for pre-primary education at only 38%.³³

Education access can be negatively impacted by factors from falling incomes that make ECE centers or school fees unaffordable to lost paperwork necessary for enrollment, like identification cards and birth certificates.⁶ ECE centers and schools may close because of damage from extreme weather or teachers may themselves leave or be displaced.²⁴ Mobility itself can also be a barrier to access—young children still on their journeys may not be in one place long enough to enroll in ECE or ECE systems experiencing significant in-migration may be overstrained and unable to accommodate new learners.³ At home, caregivers may be too busy or stressed to attend to children's need for play, stimulation, and learning.

As a result, displaced children may have worse learning outcomes and fall behind their non-displaced peers in host communities.⁶ Unmet MHPSS needs can impede a young child's ability to learn and thrive in ECE. One study found that one in every three children who were displaced after Hurricane Katrina was a year or more behind their peers in school.²⁴ After a move, children may also lose access to early childhood educators with similar backgrounds, culturally sensitive education, and instruction in their own language—all of which can further negatively impact their early learning.

The Impacts of Privatized Childcare and ECE

ECE and childcare are highly privatized in many contexts. Families often rely on private providers who struggle to provide services at prices that low-income families can afford.³⁴ As a result, the impacts of climate mobility on income are likely to have outsized impacts on children's access to care and early learning. As climate change and mobility both eat away at family resources, fewer and fewer families may be able to afford privately provided ECE or childcare. Without government assistance, employer-provided childcare, or public alternatives to provide early learning and care, many families may be priced out of the market entirely or forced to enroll their children in lower-quality centers.

These effects can be reinforcing: if a family cannot afford to put their child into a local ECE or childcare center, they may not have another safe place for their young child to be during the day. This is especially likely for families who lost access during their moves to their extended family and other trusted adults who previously would have helped provide childcare. Lack of access to ECE and childcare services in turn becomes a limiting factor to the types and amount of income-generating work caregivers—especially mothers—can engage in.³⁴ If these limitations negatively impact a family's income, they have entered a reinforcing cycle where a lack of financial resources reduces ECE access which further reduces financial resources.

3.2.5 Safety and Security

Children deserve a safe place to grow up. Young children who have lost or left their homes because of climate change have already experienced how dangerous the world can be. Once on their journeys to a new home, they face additional hurdles to safety and security. From safety concerns in transit and a lack of legal protections to inadequate housing and continued climate risks that leave them at risk of future displacement, children experiencing climate mobility face a range of vulnerabilities.

Children on the move are at increased risk of violence and harassment.³ The stresses associated with displacement, including trauma, family separation, loss of social networks, and economic stress, are all associated with higher rates of violence against children.³ Children exposed to violence in their early years may have worse developmental outcomes, with exposure to violence negatively associated with language acquisition, cognitive functioning, and social-emotional development.³⁵ Children who have been separated from their families before or during transit are often at the highest risk of violence, exploitation, and neglect.¹⁴

Legal Protections for Young Children Experiencing Climate Mobility

The majority of young children experiencing climate mobility will stay close to home. However, others will cross borders, and that journey can introduce new and exacerbated threats to their safety, including a lack of legal protections. Refugee law may cover young children fleeing conflict or persecution with links to climate change, like civil instability exacerbated by drought.²⁵ However, the majority of climate-related reasons for leaving home will not be covered by current refugee law.²⁵ As a result, most people will not meet current standards for humanitarian admission into a new country.³

Without accessible legal pathways to move, young children and their families experiencing the worst effects of climate change may be trapped with nowhere safe to go—or may feel forced to migrate outside of regular pathways. Some young children and their families leaving climate hotspots may cross borders as ‘irregular migrants’, meaning they may enter a country outside of an official border crossing or stay in a country without a valid visa or residence permit.³⁶ Other children may be forced to leave countries that are no longer habitable—like small island states threatened by sea-level rise—or may lose their documentation that proves their nationality, effectively rendering them stateless.³⁷

Stateless children and irregular migrants may face some of the largest gaps in their legal protections. These children are often invisible, excluded, and ignored in climate change and disaster response planning. According to UNHCR, these children may be denied access to social services and protections only available to nationals or regular migrants, left out of community surveys and census data, and not included in the national adaptation plans or DRR policies.³⁷

As young children and their families move out of climate hotspots, they may move into areas with their own climate risks and vulnerabilities. This will often take the form of families from extremely high-risk communities moving to nearby urban areas where they will face *relatively* fewer—but still present—climate risks.³⁸ For instance, research on IDPs in Colombia found that many chose to move to areas at risk of landslides, flooding, and fires, both because they

faced limited options and because their previous exposure to conflict and displacement made the risks seem more manageable.³⁹ When families move from one high-risk home to another, young children are at increased risk of experiencing additional disasters and displacement.

While counterintuitive, moving locally to a still at-risk area may be better for families than a farther move to a less vulnerable area for several reasons. When families move within their region, the move may be easier and less expensive. They may be able to stay somewhere culturally similar and where their mother tongue is still spoken. They may also have family or friends nearby to help them successfully integrate. As with many choices around mobility, where to move is a complicated decision that is not solely based on climate vulnerabilities. The point is not to judge the decisions that families make, but rather to understand the ways these decisions affect upcoming migration hotspots and how they shape young children's climate risks so policymakers and practitioners can adequately plan and prepare.

4. Promising Practices and Gaps

There is good news: there are positive examples to build on. Many existing ECD practices, including those from the field of ECD in emergencies, can help meet the needs of children experiencing climate mobility. This includes ensuring all sectors that serve children are themselves resilient and adaptable, meet the needs of children on the move (e.g., through remote or mobile programming), and focus on the inclusion needs of children away from home, such as by attending to language, culture, and bias in all aspects of programming.

This section covers four key areas of current and promising practices. All of these are resources for policymakers and practitioners as they build a child-friendly approach to addressing climate mobility.

4.1 Guiding Principles for Children on the Move in the Context of Climate Change

In 2022, UNICEF and IOM, together with the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University and United Nations University, Center for Policy Research launched “Guiding Principles for Children on the Move in the Context of Climate Change.”⁴⁰ The principles are intended to be used by governments, international organizations, and NGOs working with children in this space. These principles, described in Table 3, offer a starting point for the design of all policies and programs affecting children experiencing climate mobility. In the future, UNICEF and IOM hope to pilot these guiding principles with select countries to provide more detailed and tangible examples of how they can be applied in practice.

Table 3. Guiding principles for children on the move in the context of climate change

Principles	Description
1. Rights-based approach	Children do not lose any of their rights when they experience climate mobility.
2. Best interests of the child	All decisions should be rooted in the best interests of the child.
3. Accountability	All actors, including governments, should be held accountable for their actions that contribute to climate mobility.

Principles	Description
4. Awareness and participation in decision-making	Children have the right to be informed and included in age-appropriate ways in decisions that affect them.
5. Family unity	Children have the right to be cared for by their caregivers and to special assistance when separated.
6. Protection, safety and security	Children have the right to be safe, including the right to protection from violence and exploitation.
7. Access to education, healthcare and social services	Children have the right to access important services like education and healthcare throughout their journey.
8. Non-discrimination	Children have the right to exercise these rights regardless of their parent's migratory status.
9. Nationality	Governments should ensure all children have access to a nationality, including and up to providing nationality for stateless children experiencing climate change.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Georgetown University, Institute for the Study of International Migration (GU-ISIM), United Nations University, Center for Policy Research (UNU-CPR). *Guiding Principles for Children on the Move in the Context of Climate Change*. New York: UNICEF; 2022.

<https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/811/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-Guiding-Principles-for-children-on-the-move-in-the-context-of-climate-change-2022.pdf>.

4.2 Practices for Promoting Nurturing Care in Crisis

Policymakers and practitioners can also draw on the many actionable examples of potential solutions already in place. Table 4 below summarizes the negative impact that climate mobility may have on each aspect of nurturing care, as described in section 3.2, with potential solutions and strategies for each in the adjacent column. By integrating best practices from these approaches, practitioners can build future-proofed services for children, ones that will adapt to the changing context of climate change and climate mobility.

Table 4. Potential solutions for nurturing care in light of climate mobility

	Impacts of climate mobility	Potential solutions
Good health 	- Disruptions in routine care and vaccinations - Changing disease burden from climate change - Impacts of displacement and migration on childhood health - Urban health challenges (e.g., air pollution and waterborne illnesses) - MHPSS impacts of climate mobility - Economic, legal, and social barriers to accessing health services - Lack of medical records (e.g., left behind, lost, destroyed)	- Design DRR-informed health systems - Provide MHPSS support to children and caregivers - Focus on cultural preservation, inclusion, and belonging - Remove legal barriers to accessing healthcare - Invest in mHealth and other mobile health modalities - Develop contingencies plans for disrupted systems - Recruit and train health workers in providing culturally sensitive care in appropriate languages, with an emphasis on recruitment from the climate mobile community - Expand WASH facilities and services, especially in urban environments
Adequate nutrition	- Decreased agricultural productivity - Increasing food prices - Impacts of poor sanitation on malnutrition	- Provide school feeding to meet the nutritional needs of school-age children - Educate parents education on climate-resilient, nutritious crops

	Impacts of climate mobility	Potential solutions
	• Loss of traditional means of collecting food (e.g., fishing or agricultural practices) • Lack of culturally appropriate food	• Expand WASH facilities and services to improve nutritional outcomes • Build garden plots • Integrate consultations on local food practices in relocation planning
Responsive caregiving 	• Family separation as a result of displacement • Seasonal or temporary separation from caregivers • Loss of extended family and support networks • Lack of access to quality, affordable childcare options • Chronic stress among caregivers affecting the quality of responsive care	• Develop policies that protect family unity during both internal and international mobility • Facilitate pathways for children to move with their extended family and networks (e.g. through planned relocation) • Expand MHPSS and others support for caregivers, teachers, health workers, etc.
Opportunities for early learning 	• Disruption in education access during or after the journey • Damaged ECE structures from extreme weather events • Learning loss from displacement • Economic, legal, and social barriers to accessing ECE • Bullying and stigmatization in the classroom • Instruction is not in a child's mother tongue • Lack of cultural sensitivity	• Build strong early literacy and early numeracy foundations • Provide catch-up programs for school-age children • Develop DRR-informed ECE and primary education curricula • Enable remote and mobile early learning • Use ECE centers to communicate DRR and EWS • Craft policies that support integration in classrooms • Provide mother tongue education • Recruit and train ECE instructors from children's home community • Expand free or subsidized childcare services
Safety and security 	• Violence, abuse, or neglect • Gaps in legal protections • Possibility of irregular migration or statelessness • Climate risks in both origin and host communities • Informal settlements and inadequate housing at risk of climate impacts	• Invest in child protection services and structures • Build legal pathways and protection for mobility, especially internationally • Communicate climate risks and DRR to caregivers and children in age-appropriate ways • Expand urban housing and urban DRR

Source: Author's creation consolidating information from multiple sources

Among the common themes are the need for inclusive, child-centered policies that allow children to move safely with their families, without losing access to critical protections and services; programming that is adapted to children's needs, designed to be culturally sensitive, and offered in a child's mother tongue; resilient systems and services that are mobile or remote-ready so children can access them on the move; and child-friendly local planning that accounts for potential in- or out-migration, like urban planning efforts that consider the need for increases in ECD financing, workforce development, and service delivery ahead of future population growth.

4.3 Country Spotlights with Promising Practices and Policies

A lot of work is already being done in these areas. Promising examples from around the world are included below (see Figure 1). These ten promising practices and policies were identified by the project's key informants, representing where these experts in climate mobility and ECD have seen current practices that could be adapted or scaled to meet the needs of young children experiencing climate mobility. These policies and programs may not be appropriate everywhere, but they highlight the wide range of possible approaches to ensuring all children have access to nurturing care, regardless of where they move from or where they are moving to.

Figure 1. Locations of country spotlights with promising practices and policies



Source: Author's creation consolidating information from multiple sources

4.3.1 Facilitating Family-Friendly International Mobility Policies

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Policy	Vanuatu	The policy most directly addresses Safety and Security, Opportunities for Early Learning, and Good Health

Vanuatu is one of the most at-risk countries in the world from climate change and extreme weather events like cyclones, flooding, and droughts.⁴⁰ Almost a quarter of Vanuatu's population was displaced in 2015 by Tropical Cyclone Pam, the strongest storm that is ever recorded to have hit the country.⁴¹ In the aftermath, policymakers came together to discuss the urgent need for improved evacuation, displacement, and relocation planning. The result was the [National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement](#) launched in 2018.⁴⁰ The policy systematically integrates climate mobility into key institutions and social sectors like housing, health, and education, with a particular focus on women and children.⁴²

In the policy, the government of Vanuatu committed to exploring ways in which safe international labor mobility schemes might be an option for families to both improve their livelihoods and adapt to climate change.⁴³ The policy also commits to ensuring all mobility takes place with dignity and respect for human rights.⁴³ This proactive approach to planning for international mobility, especially at the family level, will be critical to enabling families

with young children to make the best, most adaptive decisions they can while staying together. The policy is also an example of how governments can plan for continuity in education and health for children affected by climate mobility, including displaced children, internal migrants, and children moving through planned relocation.⁴¹

4.3.2 Including Children in Regional Policies

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Policy	The Pacific	These policies support children’s Safety and Security by promoting legal pathways for international mobility

In 2017, Fiji, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Nauru, and other Pacific island states endorsed the [Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific](#).⁴³ Through the framework, these states committed to prioritizing the most vulnerable in their responses, including children, upholding their rights, and including their voices in the planning and implementation of response efforts.⁴³ Governments also committed to exploring relocation and labor migration policies as a part of broader efforts to protect those most vulnerable to climate-related displacement and migration.⁴³

More recently, Pacific states adopted the [Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility](#) in recognition of the need to strengthen coordination and adopt a more proactive approach to addressing climate mobility.⁴⁴ The Framework includes a commitment to ensuring vulnerable populations like children can move safely.⁴⁵ It also acknowledges that vulnerable migrants may require additional human rights protection either as a result of their journeys or the stigma and discrimination they may face upon arrival.⁴⁵

4.3.3 Meeting the Needs of Children in Planned Relocation

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Program	Panama	This policy promotes Opportunities for Early Learning by protecting education and play spaces

Members of the indigenous Guna community in Panama have started to relocate from their island of Gardi Sugdub to the mainland community of Isber Yala.⁴⁷ Gardi Sugdub is overcrowded, prone to flooding, and facing rising sea levels, prompting conversations with the government about relocation as early as 2010.⁴⁷ Years of open community consultations followed, keeping with the planned relocation principles of free, prior, and informed consent.⁴⁸ In June 2024, 300 families moved to Isber Yala while 200 members of the community chose to stay behind.⁴⁹

The relocation is still new and too early to be declared a success. However, certain aspects are promising. Building on conversations with the Guna community, Isber Yala has been designed to include traditional gathering spaces and meet other cultural needs of the community.⁴⁷ In response to community demand, the new site also includes some [crucial areas for children](#) that Gardi Sugdub could not: playgrounds, sports fields, and less crowded classrooms.^{48,49,50} As more communities contemplate planned relocation in response to climate change, this practice—consulting with children and their caregivers, understanding where their needs are currently unmet and assessing their priorities, and using that knowledge to



help make a community that is not only safe but child-friendly—will be critical to promoting ECD amongst climate mobile communities.

4.3.4 Integrating Children on the Move

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Policy	Uganda; Colombia	These policies support Safety and Security through legal pathways for mobility, and Opportunities for Early Learning and Good Health through integration

Uganda is home to the largest refugee population in Africa, drawing in displaced people from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and many nearby countries.⁵¹ Children arriving in Uganda are welcomed into one of the most [progressive policy environments](#) for refugees in the world. For the majority of these children, Uganda will recognize their refugee status *prima facie*, meaning that their status is accepted based on their nationality, rather than through a cumbersome individual determination process.⁵² While these refugees do not receive Ugandan citizenship, they have the right to move, the right to work, and are integrated into national systems.⁵³ Children have the right to access healthcare and to enroll in primary and secondary education.⁵³ Of course, legal access is not everything, especially without sufficient financing and social inclusion to foster integration and belonging. In Uganda, there are very real differences in everything from ECE enrollment rates to employment between the refugee and host communities.⁵¹ However, an inclusive legal framework can be a critical foundation for young children on the move, and Uganda is a global example of what that might look like.

Across the world, Colombia offers another example. Colombia is home to the third-largest refugee population in the world as it welcomes refugees and migrants leaving Venezuela.⁵⁴ Since 2021, Colombia has offered [Temporary Protected Status](#) for these refugees, a status that allows Venezuelans to legally stay in the country for a decade, enter the workforce, and access critical services and benefits.⁵⁴ This extraordinary measure has allowed young refugees and migrants to receive identification, health services, and education, while their caregivers can find formal employment.⁵⁵ Policies like these help young children and families on the move find stability, giving them the time and resources to start building a new home.

4.3.5 Reaching Children in Their Own Language

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Policy	Sweden	This policy enables Opportunities for Early Learning in children's mother tongues

In Sweden, children who have arrived as asylum seekers have access to daycares and schools, starting in early childhood. From age one, children can be enrolled in daycare while their caregivers work or attend classes themselves.⁵⁶ From age three, they have access to pre-primary education, including up to 15 hours per week without a fee.⁵⁶ When enrolling their children, caregivers are asked about their primary language and whether they would like their child to receive mother tongue instruction.⁵⁷ Through its [mother tongue instruction program](#), children in Sweden have received instruction in up to 150 languages.^{57,58} Mother tongue education is open to children in Sweden regardless of whether they are new arrivals, but with certain adjustments to meet the needs of new arrivals and might require a mix of mother tongue and Swedish as a second language support.⁵⁷ Policies like these can help ensure

continuity of education for children on the move, including children experiencing climate mobility.

4.3.6 Expanding Access to Healthcare for Children

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Policy	Thailand	This policies support Safety and Security by enabling legal pathways for mobility and Good Health by integrating migrant children in national systems

Thailand is one of the only countries in the world to provide [universal health coverage](#) for migrants.⁵⁹ Host to migrants from around the region, including from Cambodia, the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, and Myanmar, Thailand recognizes that healthcare is not only a human right but a precondition to full integration that enables children to thrive in school and their parents to find employment.⁶⁰ Thailand is among the countries that have implemented 'one-stop service' centers where families can start the process of legalizing their status and accessing insurance schemes.⁶ After the outbreak of COVID-19, Thailand further expanded free screening and treatment so both migrants and Thai nationals could receive needed care, which may have been critical in helping the country keep both cases and deaths from the virus low.⁶¹ Thailand is an example of how countries can effectively integrate children and families on the move in their national health systems.

4.3.7 Meeting Children Where They Are

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Program	Uganda (Karamoja region); India	These programs ensure Opportunities for Early Learning for children on the move, and Mobile Creches addresses elements of Adequate Nutrition and Good Health

Outside of responses designed for displaced or migrant children, practitioners can learn from existing practices to meet the ECD needs of pastoralist and nomadic children. In Northeastern Uganda's region of Karamoja, the [Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja \(ABEK\) program](#) was launched to reach children from the Karimojong community.⁶² The majority of children in these communities do not attend school and only a quarter of the population is literate.⁶³ Instead of attending formal schooling, children are often expected by their families to herd livestock.⁶³ ABEK works to address these challenges by meeting children close to the livestock grazing areas, with lessons frequently held under trees.⁶³ Lessons not only focus on traditional subjects but also on the impact of climate change on drylands and pastoralism.⁶² The program serves as a reminder that not all learning needs to take place within a classroom.

In India, millions of families have migrated internally. Many of these migrants work informally in fields like construction, where they may not earn enough to afford basic services like childcare.⁶⁴ [Mobile Creches](#) is an NGO working to provide free childcare for these families, eight hours a day, six days a week.⁶⁴ As the name implies, these creches are mobile and their locations may shift as some construction sites wrap up their work and others sites are newly set up.⁶⁴ Recognizing that families may continue to move to find work, the program is designed with the idea that children may only be enrolled for a few months at a time. The four-month curriculum attempts to maximize this time with young children, addressing needs ranging from nutrition to ECE.⁶⁴ The creches can also be critical for female caregivers who

otherwise bear the brunt of childcare responsibilities. With care provided, many can go out and work, enabling them to earn their own incomes.⁶⁴

As countries consider how to best meet the needs of children experiencing climate mobility, these programs elevate the importance of meeting children where they are—not only for the children but for their families. This can be a critical tool for promoting inclusion and ensuring that already vulnerable families are not left behind.

4.3.8 Supporting Young Children Remotely

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Program	Bangladesh	This program supports Opportunities for Early Learning, Responsive Caregiving, and Good Health through tele-learning and tele-counseling for children and caregivers

There will also be times when children are simply not able to make it to a specific location to access services, even if that location is local and mobile. In Bangladesh, the COVID-19 pandemic added yet another challenge to supporting children from the forcibly displaced Rohingya community or nearby host communities.⁶⁵ The BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED) has been providing high-quality, play-based ECD services to Rohingya and host community children for years through its Humanitarian Play Lab model. When children were no longer able to access their Play Labs in person, BRAC IED pivoted, launching a remote response instead. A team of curriculum developers and psychologists adapted the curriculum to launch *Pashe Achhi* (Bangla for “Beside You”), a phone-based program that combines tele-learning and tele-counseling for young children up to age five and their caregivers through weekly 20-minute calls.^{65,66} Recognizing the potential benefits of *Pashe Achhi* even outside of the pandemic and humanitarian response, BRAC IED is currently piloting the program in some of the most climate-affected areas of Southern Bangladesh, where children are frequently exposed to the physical and psychosocial effects of cyclones and other climate hazards.⁶⁵

4.3.9 Designing Culturally Sensitive Programs

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Program	Iraq; Jordan; Lebanon; Syria	This program supports Opportunities for Early Learning and Good Health through culturally-sensitive programs for children on the move

No matter where or how children on the move are receiving services, they need to be adapted to reflect their culture. Through *Ahlan Simsim* (Arabic for “Welcome Sesame”), Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee have reached more than 3 million children and caregivers affected by the crisis in Syria, spanning across Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.^{67,68} It is the largest ever ECD initiative in humanitarian response. Interventions range from television programming and integrating ECD into health services to caregiver support and play-based learning.⁶⁸ The program design was shaped by community consultations across all four countries, which also informed the initial focus on building children’s emotional literacy and responding to their traumatic life experiences.⁶⁹ For the television programming, each episode is informed by local ECD specialists to ensure that it is culturally relevant and relatable for children.⁷⁰ As children move to new places, this type of

co-development with communities and local experts will be critical in making sure the ECD services they receive not only reflect their local culture and heritage but also help preserve it.

4.3.10 Building a Child-Friendly City

Policy or Program	Location	Relevance to Nurturing Care
Program	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	This program will most closely support Opportunities for Early Learning and Good Health by expanding daycares, ECD centers, and play spaces

As climate mobility contributes to urbanization, one of the central questions for child-centered responses to climate mobility will be how to promote the inclusive development of child-friendly cities. Addis Ababa is a global leader in this space, with a comprehensive plan to meet the needs of all children under age seven.⁷¹ The Addis Ababa City Administration launched the [“Children: The Future Hope of Addis Ababa Early Childhood Development Initiative”](#) integrated ECD program to provide more than 330,000 families with integrated support that brings together parent coaching, community-run ECD, daycare, expanded pre-primary access, and play spaces, supported by cross-sector governance, standards, and monitoring.⁷²

In the coming years, Addis Ababa also hopes to become home to an ECD Center of Excellence, a place that can influence ECD policies and best practices throughout Ethiopia and the broader continent.⁷¹ As urban areas around the world plan for growth, including how to scale child-serving sectors, Addis Ababa serves as an example of what audacious city planning for children can look like.

4.4 Gaps and Barriers to Nurturing Care for Children on the Move

While there is a lot to be learned from the work that is already being done, there are also large gaps in current practices and barriers to expanding support to young children experiencing climate mobility.

4.4.1 Gaps in Policy and Legal Frameworks

Policymakers have under-prioritized preparing for children’s climate mobility. Even the broader effects of climate change on children’s lives are often not considered in policy and planning efforts. For example, a World Bank survey found that education policymakers were often unaware of the urgent need for adaptation in the sector, with many unable to answer basic questions about climate change and only half aware that extreme heat impedes children’s learning.⁷³ When asked to rank a set of ten issue areas, more than 60% ranked protecting learning from climate change within their bottom three priorities.⁷³ If climate change generally is not even prioritized in sector planning, the inclusion of climate mobility may be long way off.

While child-centered policies and sectors tend to ignore climate risks, policies focused on climate change and climate mobility tend to ignore children. Global frameworks that touch on climate mobility, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 or the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, rarely go beyond acknowledging children as a vulnerable population and encouraging governments to provide continuity in health and education.^{16,17} With a few exceptions, like Vanuatu and other Pacific states,

policies at regional and national levels are often no different. As of 2021, UNICEF and IOM concluded that, “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.”⁷⁴

This reflects a broader gap in political discourse: young children experiencing climate mobility are often deprioritized or forgotten. There is still a need to build the case to policymakers to prioritize young children on the move in the context of climate change, especially when responding to other crises can feel more urgent. Rather than trying to make children and climate mobility a priority, this best path forward may instead be finding new ways to articulate how climate mobility fits into existing policy priorities like inclusive urban development and future-proofed education and health systems.

4.4.2 Gaps in Programming and Service Delivery

Similarly, most programs and services are not explicitly designed for the needs of young children on the move, including those experiencing climate mobility. As a result, young children may face a variety of barriers and gaps in accessing care, education, and health services. These range from barriers that prevent them from even enrolling in or accessing services in the first place to cultural, language, and financial barriers that further undermine access and quality of the services. In areas expected to be affected by climate mobility, there is a need to integrate a climate mobility lens into all programs serving young children.

Expanded programming for these young children will also require additional financing. However, existing financing for both ECD and climate adaptation efforts is already limited and strained. Finding new or expanded sources of funding will be crucial to ensuring programs are able to meet the needs of young children most affected by climate mobility.

4.4.3 Gaps in Data and Evidence

There is a need for more child-specific data and evidence on the impact of climate mobility on young children’s lives. There is a large gap in the availability of age-disaggregated data among populations that have been displaced or migrated because of climate change.¹⁴ These data gaps make it difficult to estimate how many children have been or will be affected by climate mobility.³ These gaps can render children in early childhood close to invisible in the data. Additionally, more research is needed to explore the impacts of climate mobility on young children and whether and how climate mobility affects children differently from other forms of mobility. While more robust and child-sensitive data and evidence bases are still being built, policymakers and practitioners need to continue to plan and respond in the absence of complete information.

5. Recommendations

In order to apply promising practices where they are needed most and expand support for children and families on the move due to climate factors, policymakers and practitioners must work together intentionally and bridge ECD and climate-related services. The recommendations and examples above have been summarized into the following list of initial recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working on ECD policies and programs in areas that may be affected by climate mobility.



Recommendations for policymakers:

- **Fully incorporate and promote the Guiding Principles for Children on the Move in the Context of Climate Change.** This will help ensure children's rights and well-being are kept at the heart of all responses to climate mobility.
- **Include a child-friendly, mobility-sensitive lens in all relevant national policies around climate change, including National Adaptation Plans.** Policies and plans around climate change should be designed with children in mind, including children who have been displaced, migrated, or relocated, as well as those who are immobile.
- **Expand pathways for safe, legal international migration for whole families.** There is a need for increased legal migration pathways that allow families to move out of climate vulnerable places. These policies should be designed to enable families to move together to prevent the negative impacts of family separation on young children.
- **Invest in high-quality, age-disaggregated data for children experiencing climate mobility.** Expanding access to disaggregated data on children who have been displaced or migrated will allow for better tracking and response in the communities that children are moving from and moving to.
- **Build the resilience of data systems to withstand climate impacts.** This is important to prevent losing children's data during extreme weather events.
- **Include children in age-appropriate ways in community consultations on climate impacts and mobility.** Young children and their caregivers deserve meaningful opportunities to directly engage in decisions around if, when, where, and under what conditions they move.
- **Ensure the inclusion of migrant and displaced children in policies and sector planning.** This includes ensuring sector policies and plans take into account the inclusion and accessibility concerns—legal, physical, financial, cultural, and linguistic—of children on the move, including children experiencing climate mobility.
- **Promote inclusive, child-friendly growth in areas expected to expand as a result of climate mobility, with a focus on urban centers.** This includes building quality housing, upgrading WASH systems, promoting job growth for children's caregivers, designing green play spaces, expanding and strengthening services for children like ECE and childcare, and investing in the ECD workforce.
- **Invest in early warning systems and anticipatory action.** These measures reduce the damage and displacement caused by extreme weather events by ensuring families have access to accurate, timely information and resources *before* disaster strikes.
- **Expand domestic financing for young children and climate mobility.** Responding to climate mobility will not come without a cost. There is a need for expanded sources of sustainable financing to support climate mobility planning and response.

Recommendations for practitioners:

- **Understand and plan around community needs, including whether a community is expected to grow or shrink as a result of climate mobility.** Tailor support and services to young children and their caregivers depending on whether their area is more likely to experience families moving out or families moving in as a result of climate change.
- **Promote foundational, transferable skills that children can take with them.** This includes skills like early literacy and numeracy that will serve as solid foundations for children wherever they are moving from or to.
- **Recruit ECD workers from the same community as children experiencing climate mobility.** Wherever possible, recruit ECE instructors, childcare workers, and healthcare workers who are from the same or nearby communities as children experiencing climate mobility.
- **Provide training to ECD workers on reducing bias and stigma in service delivery.** This is important in reducing the social barriers that children and their families experience when attempting to access services in new communities.
- **Offer ECD services in children's mother tongues.** To reduce language barriers that children may experience in a new place, ensure children are able to access healthcare, ECE, and other services in their mother tongue.
- **Incorporate MHPSS in all services to children and caregivers experiencing climate mobility.** Recognizing the immense need for psychosocial support among displaced and migrant communities, build in MHPSS where appropriate in all ECD programs.
- **Equip children with age-appropriate DRR skills and information.** Build children's knowledge and skills on how to protect themselves and respond to extreme weather events in age-appropriate ways, for example through evacuation drills or by using games or songs to teach safety behaviors.
- **Develop contingency plans for service delivery after sudden-onset events.** This includes planning for how emergency support and supplies will be distributed if needed, if and how temporary learning spaces or health clinics will be set up, and how staffing gaps will be addressed if local teachers, healthcare workers, and others are directly affected.
- **Build mobile-ready or remote-enabled programs that can reach children along their journeys.** This could include programs that move with children wherever they are (e.g., phone-based programs) or that meet them at select points along common migration routes (e.g., one-stop centers).

Recommendations for researchers:

- **Advocate for expanded and improved data on young children experiencing climate mobility.** Encourage policymakers and others to expand investments in high-quality,



age-disaggregated data on young children who have been displaced or migrated in the context of climate change.

- **Expand the evidence base on effective programs for meeting the needs of young children impacted by climate mobility.** This includes partnering with practitioners to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches to meeting the needs of young children affected by climate mobility. This includes remote and mobile programming for children still on the move, MHPSS programs for young children who have experienced extreme weather events, and two-generation approaches for children and caregivers who have migrated to urban areas.
- **Explore the areas of commonality and differences between children experiencing climate mobility and other forms of mobility.** There is a need for more research that explores whether, when, and how different drivers of displacement or migration affect young children's experiences and needs.

Since every child and every community may be affected differently, this list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather a starting point for further reflection and discussion when developing a policy, program, or evaluations. [Appendix 4](#) offers a checklist for ECD policymakers and practitioners when designing potential policies and interventions.

6. Conclusion

This project highlights how climate mobility is already affecting young children's lives, including every aspect of nurturing care. Climate mitigation efforts are critical, but they will not be enough on their own. Children's lives have already been deeply shaped by climate change. Millions are displaced each year by sudden onset effects of climate change like extreme weather events, and as the slow onset impacts continue to build, millions more children may move through migration or planned relocation.³ Even with ambitious mitigation efforts, this will be children's reality and it is critical that policymakers and practitioners begin to plan and respond.

To understand where the international community is in its understanding, preparation, and response to this issue, this project explored the following questions:

1. **Are the nurturing care needs of children who will experience climate mobility different from children who will not? If so, how?**

Young children who experience climate mobility face the combined effects of both climate change and migration or displacement, which could impact every element of their nurturing care. These impacts can be mutually reinforcing: as climate change erodes family resources, families have less ability to make empowered, adaptive decisions around their mobility.² This makes them more likely to stay in vulnerable places until they face displacement or to move into new homes in overcrowded informal settlements that present new climate threats and could even lead to secondary displacement.³ This in turn exposes young children to new risks to their well-being at the same time that they may either lose access to ECE, healthcare, or childcare, or face stigma, language, and financial barriers to utilizing these services.⁶ As a result, children who experience climate mobility may have urgent needs in all aspects of their

nurturing care: health (including mental health), nutrition, early learning, responsive caregiving, and safety and security.

2. How can ECD services and policies best respond to the needs of young children and their caregivers experiencing climate mobility? Are there gaps in current practices?

A lot of work is already being done to reduce children's exposure to or vulnerability from climate mobility, develop inclusive policies for children on the move, create programming that is mobile-ready and culturally sensitive, and build cities that meet children's needs. While far from comprehensive, the country spotlights with promising policies and practices showcase work already in action that policymakers, advocates, and practitioners can learn from. At the same time, programs or policies explicitly addressing climate mobility are very rare, and those explicitly targeting young children and climate mobility are practically non-existent. There is a need for more policies and programs that directly address the needs of young children who have or will be climate mobile, both in their home communities and in the communities they move to. Filling that gap may require better data, more research, and additional financing. It may also require making the case to policymakers that these programs help advance existing priorities and protect government investments in poverty alleviation, urban development, education, and health.

3. What can be learned from existing innovations that seek to address the nurturing care needs of children on the move for other reasons (e.g., because of conflict)?

A great deal can be learned from existing practices in the field of children on the move, including from programs meeting the needs of children who have been displaced by conflict and other non-climate reasons. While additional research on how drivers of displacement affect children's experiences and needs would be helpful in crafting more targeted approaches, young children, whether displaced by climate change or conflict, still need accessible, inclusive, and holistic care that can meet them wherever they are on their journeys. Existing practices and evidence from the field of children on the move highlights the importance of programming that can be delivered either remotely or on the move, addresses the mental health needs of both children and their caregivers, and supports children's integration into their new communities, including by reducing the cultural and legal barriers to accessing education and healthcare.

4. Are governments preparing for climate mobility? How can they integrate the needs of young children into their planning?

While select governments across the Pacific region have started to plan for climate mobility, most countries are not yet planning or preparing for this issue, much less integrating young children's needs into their efforts. Without further action or planning, climate mobility could be incredibly harmful to all aspects of nurturing care and deepen existing vulnerabilities, forcing more young children and their families into poverty.² Governments need to begin engaging young children, caregivers, and communities in their planning, preparations, and investments around climate mobility. This should include crafting policies that allow families to access accurate, timely DRR messages and early warnings; to move safely, legally, and together when needed; to access national education and health services wherever they are, free from stigma or other barriers; and to include the voices of children and their caregivers in everything from national adaptation plans to sector contingency plans.



Moving anywhere is stressful, but it can be a normal and even beneficial part of life. With early investments, thought, and care, policymakers and practitioners can help create a better future for young children who will experience climate mobility. They can envision a world in which moving enables new opportunities, rather than new risks. They can help young children and their families find new homes where they can belong and thrive. They can create a future that not only promotes ECD for some of the most vulnerable children but also protects the returns on their investments in ECD by future-proofing systems and communities.

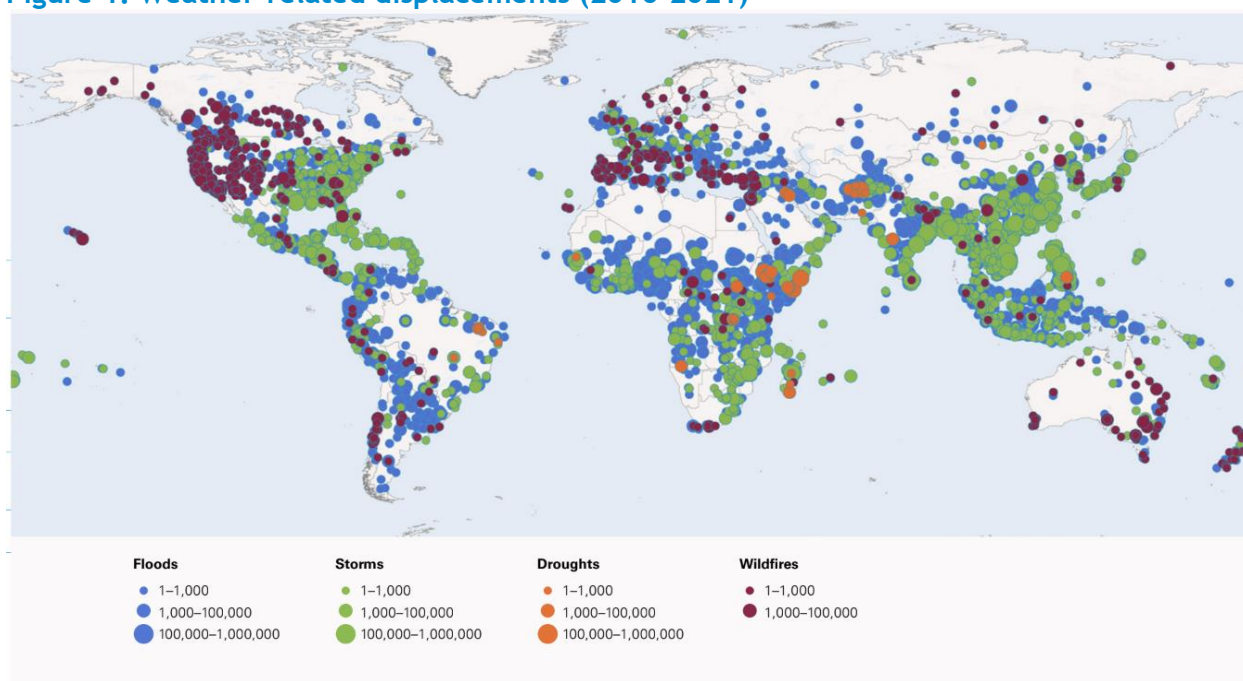


Appendices

Appendix 1. An Overview of Climate Mobility

Already, children are leaving their homes as a result of climate change. Between 2016 and 2023, an estimated 62.1 million children were displaced as a result of extreme weather events.³ This is more than 24,000 children displaced each day by factors like wildfires, flooding, and storms, which are becoming more frequent and more intense as a result of climate change. In absolute numbers, the largest numbers of children have been displaced in South Sudan and Somalia, while children in Vanuatu and other small island states have been the most impacted relative to the size of their populations.⁷⁵

Figure 1. Weather-related displacements (2016-2021)



Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Patrick J. McGovern Foundation. *Children Displaced in a Changing Climate: Preparing for a Future Already Underway*. UNICEF; 2023.

[https://www.unicef.org/media/145951/file/Climate%20displacement%20report%20\(English\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/145951/file/Climate%20displacement%20report%20(English).pdf).

The scale and speed with which children and their families will move as a result of climate change is only expected to increase in the coming decades. By 2070, between 1-3 billion people may need to relocate to stay within temperate climate zones.² Additionally, up to 3.2 million children could be displaced each year by riverine flooding alone, or close to 100 million over the next 30 years.⁷⁵ These numbers are expected to be particularly high in countries with large, young populations. In absolute numbers, weather-related displacements are estimated to most affect children in India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, the Philippines, and China.⁷⁵ Relatively to the size of their population, children in the British Virgin Islands, Bahamas, and Antigua and Barbuda may be the most affected.⁷⁵ Wherever they live, virtually every child will face some risk of displacement or migration from climate impacts.

Climate mobility decisions will not occur in a vacuum: everything from national policies to family income will shape the choices that families make about when, where, and how to move in a changing climate. Despite this, very little research, policy, or programming has focused explicitly on climate mobility and young children specifically. Below is a description of the key elements of climate mobility, from the types of climate mobility to how children's identities and backgrounds may influence their options and experiences, which may help unfamiliar with the concept understand its key dimensions.

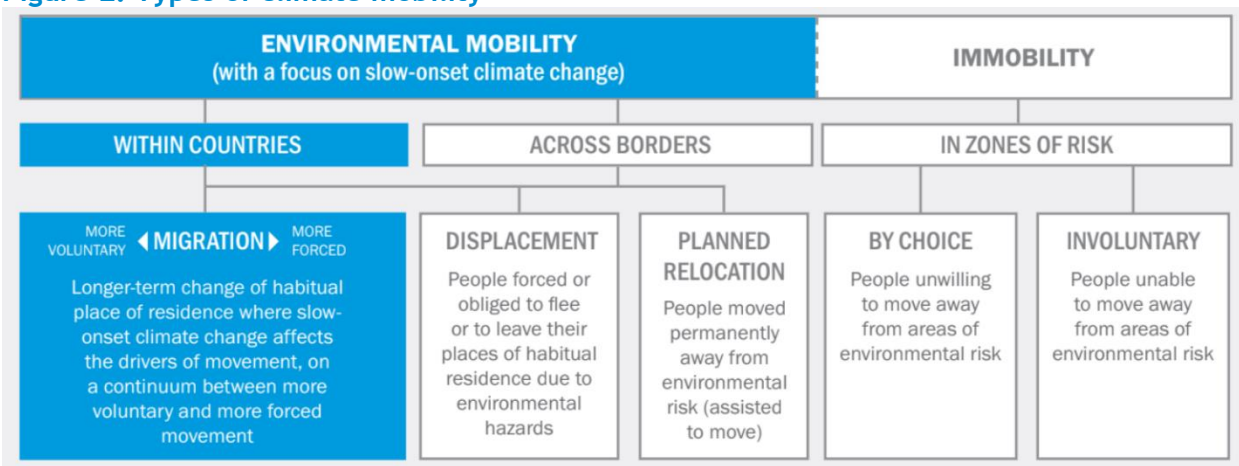
Types of Climate (Im)mobility

Climate mobility will look different for every child. Their homes may become increasingly unsafe or, in some cases, uninhabitable. They may face more frequent, intense, or less predictable extreme weather events like storms and wildfires that force them from their homes, or they may need to move as a result of slower changes in their climate like droughts and rising sea levels.⁷⁵ They may need to flee their homes as a result of a natural disaster, or their family might choose to move preemptively.⁷⁵ In other cases, a family might not want or be able to move at all and instead will stay in increasingly dangerous homes.

Aligned with the World Bank's *Groundswell* report, this report considers four main types of climate mobility:⁷⁶

- **Climate-related migration:** typically driven by slower onset factors that, over time, can affect a family's ability to live and earn a livelihood in their community of origin.
- **Climate-related displacement:** more often a response to sudden-onset events like extreme weather events that force a family from their home.
- **Planned relocation:** a process by which a community moves together out of a location with significant hazards, often with support from the government.
- **Immobility:** families who either cannot or do not wish to move out of areas with significant or growing climate risks.

Figure 2. Types of climate mobility



Source: Rigaud, KK, de Sherbinin, A, Jones B, et al. *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*. Washington, DC: World Bank; 2018. <https://hdl.handle.net/10986/29461>.

Families may move across this spectrum over time. A family facing water shortages may initially choose to stay in their home community to maintain their relationship with their land and extended family. Over time, however, the lack of water may make it harder for them to

grow enough food for their own needs or to earn an income. This can slowly erode their family income and their health. Facing increasing pressure, they may then choose to move to another area in search of more secure livelihoods, becoming migrants, or they may stay until they face an urgent crisis, like a drought, that drives them into displacement.

Dimensions of Climate Mobility

Climate mobility can take many different forms and affect young children in many different ways. Many times, mobility will take place within the same country, but it can also be international. It may be temporary, protracted, or permanent. It may be on a spectrum from more voluntary to more forced. It might be rural-rural, rural-urban, or in select cases, urban-rural. It might be more or less adaptive, depending on the circumstances in which a young child is moving. Regardless, the needs of young children need to be prioritized and protected before, during, and after their journeys.

Internal or international

Despite common narratives around climate mobility, most mobility will take place within a single country or region.⁵ In some areas, climate change may *decrease* international migration through its impact on family livelihoods and assets—after all, when faced with dwindling resources, fewer families will be able to afford to move to another country.³ These effects may be particularly felt amongst the global middle class, as many families in poverty already lack the resources to finance an international move and many wealthy families will continue to be able to move regardless.³ After droughts in West Africa, international migration is estimated to have dropped by up to 25%, for instance.¹ While moving across borders will be relatively uncommon, young children who do move internationally often lack legal protections and may require special attention.⁷⁷

Temporary or protracted

Young children who leave their homes may do so only temporarily, or they may be away from home for a protracted period. Some may never return. In general, sudden-onset climate events, like wildfires or storms, are associated with high numbers of people experiencing shorter-term and often shorter-distance displacement.⁵ On the other hand, slow-onset impacts of climate change are more associated with protracted or permanent mobility as their effects on a local environment will be harder, perhaps even impossible, to reverse.³⁷ Currently, research on climate mobility is skewed towards sudden-onset climate displacement, while research on slow-onset climate migration is much harder to come by.⁴⁰

Voluntary or forced

Because climate change limits the options available to individuals and families about whether, when, and how they move away from their homes, all climate mobility decisions are coerced to some degree. However, these choices can still exist on a spectrum of voluntary to forced depending on how much agency a family has in the decision-making process.

Rural or urban

Climate mobility is expected to contribute to urbanization as many rural areas become hotspots for climate out-migration and nearby urban areas become hotspots for in-migration. In places like West Africa, for instance, climate mobility may often take the form of families moving towards coastal urban areas with their own climate risks.⁷⁵ Already, displaced populations tend to live in urban areas: two-thirds of IDPs reside in urban or peri-urban areas.⁷⁸ As urban migration and displacement continue, more investments will need to be made into urban services and infrastructure to keep up with increased demands and strains.



Families will also need to consider whether urban areas are the right fit for them given their skills and resources.³

Adaptive or maladaptive

Climate mobility can also exist on a spectrum of more to less adaptive; in other words, they may be more or less likely to reduce a family's long-term risks and vulnerabilities. Because relocating is costly, many families will stay too long in areas that put them at risk of severe climate impacts and displacement.⁷⁹ Those who do move proactively may not have the information or resources to plan their mobility in the most safe, sustainable ways, instead choosing areas where they will face continued risks or where they may not have the skills to make a livelihood.⁷⁹ During their journey, people may also lack the opportunities to move safely or even legally, in part because of restrictive migration policies and inadequate legal protections.¹³ All of these factors can lead to non-adaptive mobility.

At the same time, when we only talk about the risks of climate mobility, we risk missing out on the times when it can be the right decision for a family to make. Sometimes mobility will help young children and their families build resilience.⁵ Those who move may be able to access safer homes, better education, and more sustainable livelihoods. An average migrant who moves from a low-income to a high-income country will see significant increases in their income and school enrollment rates, while child mortality drops dramatically.⁷⁶ In Indonesia, children who moved to districts with above-average education attainment were more likely to complete primary and secondary school.⁸⁰

In some circumstances, adults may even be able to earn enough money to send remittances back home.⁵ Remittances can be a mechanism through which climate mobility helps both the family members who leave as well as those who remain in their community of origin. In places like Somalia, the majority of households rely on remittances to cover their basic needs.⁶ In India, the remittances sent back home by an estimated 100 million migrants are worth 8 times India's national expenditures on education and health.⁶ For young children who face immobility, these remittances can be the key to whether or not they can access critical services like healthcare and ECE.

Mobility itself is not inherently adaptive or maladaptive. A lot will come down to the resources, information, and support that young children and their families have on their journeys, the legal pathways they have to move safely and with dignity, and their existing vulnerabilities.

Vulnerability and Climate Mobility

As noted in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, vulnerability to disasters is not determined by physical hazards alone, but rather by a combination of physical, social, economic, and environmental conditions that make someone more or less resilient in the face of those hazards.¹⁶ In other words, disaster risk is a social condition.³⁹ The same will be true of climate mobility. Whether and under what circumstances a young child leaves their home is determined as much by the climate risk profile of their home as by their household income, gender, disability, family structure, and a number of other individual or community factors which are explored below.⁷⁸



Gender

Women and girls face many barriers and risks that make them more prone to immobility and the least adaptive forms of mobility. Women and girls are less likely to move preemptively when facing increasing climate impacts and threats.⁷⁹ Instead, they are often the most likely to stay until they directly experience a disaster.⁷⁸ As a result, women may be up to 14 times more likely to die as a result of a natural disaster than men, and as many as 80% of those displaced by climate change may be women and girls.^{2,79} Young children's mobility is often deeply intertwined with the mobility of the women in their lives, especially their mothers. If women bear the brunt of climate-related immobility and displacement, then so will young children.

Income

According to the World Bank, up to 132 million people could be driven into poverty as a result of climate change by 2030, in part due to the disastrous impacts of climate change on agriculture incomes and food prices.² These families may lose the resources needed to move, becoming involuntarily immobile.⁵ Similar to women and girls, when families in poverty do move, it is often in contexts of displacement.⁷⁶ This is not only because they may lack the resources to move proactively, but also because poor families and poor communities have the fewest resources with which to adapt, such as by securing better insurance, strengthening their homes, or rebuilding after a disaster.³⁸

Similar effects are seen at a country level. 70% of deaths from climate disasters in the past 50 years were in the UN-designated 'least developed countries.'³ The World Bank further estimates that as many as 97% of displacements as a result of disasters throughout 2008-2013 were in low- or middle-income countries.⁷⁶ This results partly because these countries do not have the same amount of disaster-resilient infrastructure or investments in EWS and other measures that can help reduce climate vulnerability. However, the causal link also goes the other way: living in a community with a high exposure to disasters can erode resources and increase poverty.³

Sources of income are also important in determining how at-risk a family is from climate impacts. The 2024 *World Risk Report* found that full-time formal work was associated with higher reported levels of both individual and household resilience, compared to those who were only working part-time, engaged in informal work, or those without any work.²² Among those surveyed who were not engaged in the workforce, only half felt that they could help protect themselves or their families from a disaster, compared to 65% of those engaged in full-time formal work.²²

Disability

Young children and caregivers with disabilities may be the most vulnerable to climate threats.²³ They are frequently overlooked in the design of EWS and other emergency communication, missing out on critical information because existing systems and services are not designed to be accessible.³ They are also overrepresented in poor households, facing economic barriers that make it harder to proactively prepare or move out of harm's way.³ Once mobile, young children with disabilities may face a wide range of other vulnerabilities ranging from protection risks to stigmatization and exclusion.²³

Language and culture

When considering whether and where to move, language and culture are often a key consideration for a family. For young children and their families who move to areas that

speaking a different language or have cultural differences, they may face barriers to inclusion that reduce their access to services like ECE and healthcare or affect the ability of caregivers to find adequate housing and livelihoods. On the other hand, families who can move to host areas that are overall similar to their homes—in terms of languages spoken, dominant ethnic and religious groups, common types of livelihoods, and cultural and traditional practices—will often have an easier time integrating, accessing resources, and building a sense of belonging.

Family and support networks

Mobility decisions are also strongly impacted by whether and where a family has extended family or friends they can move near after experiencing climate impacts. It is terrifying moving to a new place without any connections. When a family with young children can move to a community where they have family or other support, they are more likely to have access to childcare or connections that can help them find decent work in a new community. In Indonesia, up to one-third of all migration is return migration, or moving back to a district where either a child's mother or father was born, and where they still have extended family.⁸⁰ This can also be a limiting factor: families will prefer to move to communities where they have connections, even if this means moving into a community that has its own risks or other downsides, like poor education access or quality.⁸⁰

Conflict and fragility

Lastly, young children who are already growing up in fragile or conflict-affected environments will be among the most vulnerable when they experience climate mobility. In communities already experiencing tensions or conflict, climate can exacerbate scarcity and destabilization, driving further displacement.⁷⁸ Furthermore, young children and their families in these contexts may face constrained mobility decisions—it is hard to move out of the path of risk when everywhere around you is risky.



Appendix 2. List of Key Informants

This author is grateful to the 19 key informants who offered their input on the project through semi-structured interviews.

Name	Organization
Hamidah Ashrafi Fateha	BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED)
Lucy Bassett	University of Virginia
Maria Angélica Benavides Camacho	Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE)
Erica Bower, Ph.D.	Human Rights Watch (HRW)
Christelle Cazabat, Ph.D.	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)
Cristina Colón	UNICEF
Amanda Devercelli	World Bank
Iulia Duca	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Elizabeth Ferris, Ph.D.	Georgetown University
Amer Hasan, Ph.D.	World Bank
Mohammad Safayet Khan	BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED)
Lucy Mannell Szaboova, Ph.D.	UNICEF
Anja Nielsen	Save the Children UK
Robert Oakes, Ph.D.	United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS)
Luke Pye	Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE)
Catalina Quintero	World Bank
Dana Schmidt	Echidna Giving
Sarah Smith, Ed.D.	Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Girma Yadeta	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Appendix 3. Questions & Answers with Experts

This project included robust interviews with a range of researchers, funders, and staff from multilaterals, NGOs, and networks with expertise in ECD, climate change, and/or migration and displacement. This section presents some recurring themes from these interviews in the form of questions and answers. However, as the key informants held diverse perspectives and opinions, it is important to keep in mind that this section is intended only to summarize points of frequent commonality, not to suggest unanimous agreement across any of the answers.

What is unique about climate mobility for young children?

While policymakers and practitioners wait for additional research, what experts have seen so far suggests there is a significant overlap between the needs of young children experiencing climate mobility and the needs of other young children on the move. What is unique about climate mobility is the ability to prepare our systems and policies to best respond. Unlike many other forms of crisis, policymakers and practitioners know that climate mobility is coming and can model the areas that will be most impacted, both in terms of out-migration and in-migration. By understanding these population flows, policymakers, urban planners, and sector leads can start preparing their systems for the changes that are coming. That means everything from designing new policies to ensure nurturing care for these children to investing in urban housing and expanding ECE workforce development.

How many of the existing best practices from Children on the Move programming are still relevant here?

Enough to get started. Every project working with young children on the move—regardless of their driver of mobility—should be contextualized with their community to their specific needs. In the case of climate mobility, there might be specific MHPSS needs for both children and caregivers that relate to their experiences with climate change, including whether they directly experienced an extreme weather event. They may also have lingering effects from living in a high-risk climate, including climate-related health problems or malnutrition that need attending to. Overall, what young children experiencing climate mobility need the most is nurturing care in all of its dimensions, inclusive policies and systems, and services free from stigma that can help meet them on each step of their journey. This will be very familiar to policymakers and practitioners with experience working with children on the move in other contexts.

What are the best practices in talking about climate mobility?

Often, climate mobility is discussed as a looming crisis. Estimates are shared that indicate millions, or even *billions*, could be affected in coming decades. At times and in moderation, these narratives can serve a purpose, highlighting the scale and urgency of the problem. In other cases, reducing the narrative in this way can be harmful and misleading. Current estimates are built on models that make assumptions about government action, or inaction, and often the worst-case scenarios are cherry-picked. News headlines may refer to ‘climate refugees,’ even though most people who experience climate mobility will not qualify for the legal status of a refugee. They may imply that movement will be massive or disorderly, and people will flood across borders, even though most climate mobility will be internal.

For families who will experience climate mobility, this can do more harm than good. When the narrative is overwhelming, climate mobility can register as a threat. These narratives can



trigger fear of large-scale international migration that leads to securitization and border control efforts which make those who do move *more* vulnerable and more likely to experience legal and social exclusion, not less. Practitioners and researchers need ways of communicating about this issue and spurring action that do not lean into fear-based narratives.

How can we overcome political hurdles to addressing climate mobility?

To make progress on ECD and climate mobility, it is important to make sure the proposed policies and programs fit within existing priorities. In the past few years, the global community has faced new conflicts and pandemics, while many existing crises linger. Systems are strained, responses are under-resourced, and the humanitarian architecture is overwhelmed. Within this context, even acknowledging that young children will be affected by climate change—sometimes deeply with effects that stay throughout their lives—may not be enough to spur action. After all, everyone is vulnerable to climate change in one way or another, but there is still a gap in financing and political will for both climate mitigation and adaptation. For ECD as well, the science of brain development or the enormous returns on investment for ECD have not been enough to convince every policymaker.

Instead, inroads need to be found within existing priorities. In some cases, this might be within urban development, emphasizing that any investments in urban areas need to be made with the probable future of climate mobility in mind. In other cases, it might be in women's economic empowerment, highlighting that women who have recently moved with young children to a new place are among the least likely to have alternatives to childcare and this can be a real and challenging barrier to earning a livelihood. When dealing with health and education stakeholders, it might mean emphasizing how investments in critical services and structures can be lost if they are not built for the future—and the future includes climate mobility. The point is to know the audience, know their priorities, and adapt accordingly.



Appendix 4. Questions to Consider When Planning for ECD in Climate Mobility Contexts

The following questions, while far from exhaustive, are intended to be a starting point for ECD policymakers and practitioners considering how to adapt their work in the face of climate mobility.

Element	Questions
Contextual Information	• Are the location(s) served by your program going to experience climate in-migration or out-migration? • If the location(s) will experience net in-migration, are they preparing for growth? Areas to consider include, but are not limited to: ○ Safe, affordable housing ○ WASH infrastructure ○ Transportation systems ○ Job creation ○ Child-facing services (e.g., education, health) ○ ECD workforce • If the location(s) will experience net out-migration, are they preparing for the population scale-down? • What policies or programs are in place to promote greater preparedness?
Policy Environment	• In future in-migration hotspots, are there policies designed to facilitate safe mobility? Do existing policies enable children on the move to integrate into local systems and receive services? • Where there may be international mobility, are there mobility schemes to allow families to do this legally? Do they allow families to move together to avoid family separation? • Are existing policies around mobility child-friendly? Do they align with the Guiding Principles for Children on the Move in the Context of Climate Change? • Are policies addressing needs related to preparedness and DRR (e.g., making sure property insurance, where relevant, is available and uptake is high)?
Infrastructure and Information	• What information is available to families living in future in-migration or out-migration hotspots? • Are families aware of how they may be affected by climate change and climate mobility? • Are families living in areas that may experience net out-migration aware of the pros or cons of moving to certain places (e.g., the relative climate vulnerabilities of nearby urban areas)? • Does sector planning incorporate DRR and include contingency plans for extreme weather events or other climate shocks? • Are there mechanisms to protect data systems (e.g., to prevent medical record loss for children)? • Are EWS in place? • Is DRR messaging communicated in fora accessible to children and their caregivers (e.g., at pre-primary schools)? Is it communicated in age-appropriate ways?

Element	Questions
	• Are young children given age-appropriate ways to practice disaster response (e.g., through evacuation drills)?
Service Provision	• Are services for young children in-migration hotspots accessible and inclusive? Areas to consider include: ○ Are key services (e.g., healthcare, education) accessible regardless of nationality? ○ Would a family be able to access services if they lack identification documents? ○ Are the services available in different languages? ○ Are they affordable? ○ Is there stigma or other social barriers to access that may reduce uptake? ○ Are services coordinated or consolidated, e.g. one-stop centers? • Along migration routes, will families have access to services along the way? • Are there services designed to reach children throughout their journeys (e.g., mobile or remote programming)? • Are services designed with migration timelines in mind (e.g., recognizing that children on the move may only be in one place for a few weeks or months)?

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