

CHILDREN AND THE CLIMATE MIGRATION CRISIS

Praise for Children and the Climate Migration Crisis

This is an absolute must read for anyone concerned about the climate crisis and its effects on children's lives. Not only does it provide the information and resources desperately needed by those supporting children in forced climate migration situations, it serves as a critical call to action for building better approaches to climate resilience and education in emergencies.

*Diane Whitehead,
CEO of Childhood Education International*

Through this book, [Cardarelli and Pomper] explore the pressing issue of how climate crises affect children. By combining contextual information, real-life examples, and the intersection of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and trauma-sensitive strategies, the book emphasizes the importance of climate education. The authors emphasize the need for active participation and policy development to protect children's well-being in the face of climate-related challenges.

*Sandy ElChaar,
Psychologist*

[This] book is a critical call to action for all stakeholders, especially policy makers, to address fundamental gaps in climate action. The trauma of forced migration and displacement of children, families, and communities can destroy life and entire societies. It is prudent for policy makers, decision-makers, and global citizens to care and learn about the social and emotional learning and mental and physical wellbeing of humans impacted by climate change through the valuable lessons shared in this book.

*Tonja Eagan,
CEO of Kappa Delta Pi*

Detachment is said to be essential to scholarship, but there are subjects where research and the framing of possibilities are enhanced by unhidden emotional involvement and unconcealed anger. This is a volume that vindicates that truth. As it attests, the trauma of children forced to migrate because of climate can no longer be destroyed. But it can be minimized,

through actions that are realistic leading to solutions that are enduring. Like the rosebud slowly emerging from a thicket of thorns, it offers a hope that can be realized.

*Ramu Damodaran,
First Chief of the United Nations Academic Impact*

Children are our future. Everything happening to our world today impacts their lives tomorrow – and today. Children are also some of the most vulnerable, and with growing climate change forcing people from their homes – whether due to drought, floods, rising sea levels, or collapsing food availability – the children did not create this, and we who did have a moral obligation to support them. They could be the inventors and entrepreneurs who create change and stabilise our world. But to do so they need support and education now. This book offers a roadmap for how we can – and must – offer today's children the support and education they require for the world they are inheriting.

*Robin Millington,
CEO of Planet Tracker*

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A Casebook for Global Climate
Action in Practice and Policy

By

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is dedicated to all the displaced people around the world who suffer today because of traumatic climate events and deserve the return of security and wellbeing to be able to reach their full potential for the betterment of humankind.

We extend our sincere thanks to the entire team at the Education for All Coalition (EFAC) for their support in helping refugee and migrant children around the world and for their thoughtful contributions to this work. We are also grateful to those who work in other humanitarian aid organizations, small and large, who share our common goal.

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PART ONE

THE CLIMATE MIGRATION CHALLENGE

Climate migration occurs when humankind leaves their home either permanently or temporarily because of various climate events that may result from excessive flooding, drought intensification, extreme weather events and temperatures, intensive storms, forest fires, and more. These manifestations also contribute to extreme air pollution and health-related incidences, rising sea levels causing lands to become inhabitable, reduction of accessible fresh water and agriculture-producing lands, desertification, and ultimately massive displacement and forced migration across borders and continents. These disruptions in daily lives cause hardships for families, disrupt local, regional, and global stability, and impact politics, policies, economies, employment, social systems, healthcare, education, and more.

Unfortunately, due to polarized views among leaders about climate change and resulting migration, responses and resolutions are slow to evolve. Still, a study of current cases where climate change significantly worsens already acute humanitarian problems should help awaken humanity to the severity of the climate crisis facing everyone today. Specifically, studies of the current situation in places like Greece, Lebanon, Yemen, Malawi, and Bangladesh can serve as a wake-up call and impel action to avert the worst instances of climate disaster facing humankind. Compounding current world situations that have significantly contributed to migration, it is the children who are the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, climate disasters due to climate change will have the most impact on marginalized populations like refugee children in terms of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing and thus deprived of opportunities. We have a responsibility to thoroughly examine this topic to

give voice to those who will be least prepared to confront and address the inevitable situation.

Children who have been forced to migrate, regardless of the circumstances of war, conflict, or climate disaster, are left with trauma. These harms require support, assistance, and direct intervention to mitigate their condition and despair. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a focused response that strives and provides for healthy emotional development and interpersonal skills through psychosocial methods. It focuses on self-awareness and self-control skills which are vitally important for children who have experienced chronic or acute trauma. SEL also improves overall wellbeing through mind and behavior building support with education-related activities involving games, mindfulness, art, journaling, gardening, sports, and storytelling.

Through the unique lens of climate resilience education, displaced children can gain a better understanding of their traumatic circumstances and the overall implications of climate challenges on food, water, and wellbeing insecurities. Climate resilience education provides an understanding of the environment, the implications of changing circumstances, and the necessary responses to remediate the problems. Children must be taught how to think and prepare for climate changes and disasters through personal adaptation, thereby reducing their vulnerability to stress. The integration of SEL, trauma-responsive teaching, and climate resilience education has been introduced to refugee children in several venues, including in Lebanon, Greece, Yemen, and Bangladesh, to enhance their knowledge of their circumstances and the environment, to manage their stressors and trauma for current and future challenges, and to enhance their ability to gain competencies to become productive global citizens.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY, POLITICS, POLICY, AND A GLOBAL AGENDA FOR CLIMATE MIGRATION

In the post-pandemic era, humankind is facing a complex period of humanitarian challenges and crises affecting the wellbeing of all. With conflict, disease, and social crises surrounding us, there is yet another persistent danger that permeates all facets of our global society: climate change. With ever more power and increasing frequency, devastating climate events are destroying possessions, changing our life practices, and debilitating our overall quality of life. Sadly, our children and the most marginalized people inhabiting our earth are the ones experiencing the worst effects of this growing danger. Too often, these climate events have resulted in the need to migrate internally or even to move whole families to other countries. Such forced migration poses an existential threat to our global society and needs international action now.

Climate migration occurs when people leave their homes either permanently or temporarily due to a variety of climate events that may include excessive flooding, drought intensification, extreme temperatures, intensive storms, forest fires, and more. Rising sea levels can cause once fertile land to become uninhabitable; a reduction in accessible fresh water in agriculture-dependent areas can lead to desertification. Ultimately, such factors often lead to massive displacement and forced migration across borders and continents. These disruptions in daily lives cause hardships for families, disrupt local, regional, and global stability, and negatively impact effective governance, hamper economies, disrupt employment, harm social systems, increase the pressure on healthcare regimes, and severely damage educational systems.

Experts estimate that the number of people that could potentially be displaced due to climate events by 2050 ranges up to 200 million (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2019, p. 3; this number has long been understood, see also Stern et al., 2010, p. 1). The number of people being displaced is already increasing. “Around 40.5 million new displacements were recorded in 2020, the highest figure in ten years. Disasters triggered over three times more displacements than conflict and violence” in that year (IDMC, 2021, p. 7). For context, conflicts and violence displaced around 10 million people during the same year (IDMC, 2021). In 2021, some 59 million people were internally displaced by disasters (UN, 2022), a number which is over three times greater than the number of people commonly displaced by conflict and domestic violence (9.8 million people). Of those displaced by disasters, 98% faced weather and climate hazards that could have been better managed or even averted through better living strategies (UNICEF United Kingdom, 2021).

The passionate pleas by Adriana Calderón of Mexico, Farzana Faruk Jhumu of Bangladesh, Eric Njuguna of Kenya, and Greta Thunberg of Sweden sound an alarm we should all hear: “We must acknowledge where we stand, treat climate change like the crisis it is, and act with the urgency required to ensure today’s children inherit a livable planet” (UNICEF, 2021, p. 5). The United Nations Children’s Fund noted in its *Children’s Climate Risk Index* that:

Climate change is the greatest threat facing the world’s children and young people. We have known this for some time – based on what science told us, what the stories we heard from around the world have illustrated, and what we have witnessed with our own eyes – but today, we have the first analysis of climate risk from the most important perspective on this crisis – ours. UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Index reveals that 1 billion children are at “extremely high risk” of the impacts of climate change. That is nearly half of all children. And it is happening today. Children bear the greatest burden of climate change. Not only are they more vulnerable than adults to the extreme weather, toxic hazards and diseases it causes, but the planet is becoming a more dangerous place to live. Increasingly catastrophic droughts, fires and storms are forecast to become even worse as our planet continues to warm. Important food and water systems will fail and entire cities are expected to succumb

to destructive floods. Climate change is the greatest threat facing the world's children and young people. And so, we too are rising.
(UNICEF, 2021, p. 4)

Unfortunately, due to polarized views about climate change among international leaders, responses to these very real crisis situations remain intolerably slow to evolve.

A study of current cases where climate change either causes or significantly worsens once acute humanitarian problems should help awaken humanity to the severity of the climate crisis facing everyone today and stimulate more effective responses. Specifically, cases outlining the current situation in countries such as Yemen, Malawi, Bangladesh, Greece, and the Northern Triangle of Central America can and should serve as a wake-up call and impel action to avert the worst instances of climate disasters that humankind are facing. Compounding this threat and raising the urgency of this call for action is the undeniable fact that it is our children who are the most vulnerable to these changes in climate. Children in poverty, especially those living in developing nations, will be the worst affected in terms of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing and thus the most deprived of opportunities. We have a responsibility to thoroughly examine this topic to give voice to those who will be least prepared to confront and address the inevitable disasters we face, unless and until we act.

When addressing the topic of climate change, we should also realize that we are not normally reacting to a single, isolated event and outcome, but most commonly, we must deal with one or many effects that are interrelated and linked to many other essential aspects of life: issues of shelter, production of food, access to clean water, sustainable health, and economic security. There are no boundaries to the ill effects of climate change. Tragically, again, the most impacted by this complex interrelationship are also the most vulnerable – our children.

OVERVIEW

This analysis will examine the recent history of climate migration, the applicability of present politics and policies, and the global agenda as it applies to climate-related migration and outcomes, each through the lens of how

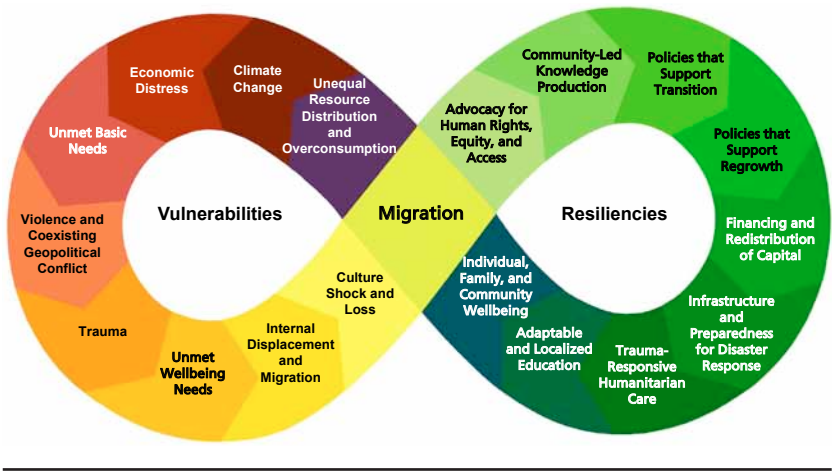
climate events can impact or contribute to trauma, and how education, policies, and resources can positively influence personal resiliency and overall human wellbeing. If we understand the many variables within this complex phenomenon, we are more apt to find viable and equitable solutions; at a minimum, we can create an awareness that brings forth a collaborative approach with all stakeholders to finding the best solutions.

Climate events and reasons for migration, whether they are internal within a country or external and extending into other countries, vary because of their unique composition, settings, and circumstances. Therefore, examples of migration presented through regionally focused chapters highlighting ongoing challenges in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Americas, and Asia, will be used to illuminate themes for action. For each region, a country synopsis is provided that addresses specific climate issues, events, impacts, vulnerabilities, and adaptability to help shape strategies, recommendations, and responsibilities at the international, national, and local levels. This multi-case analysis highlights climate issues in multiple countries in their respective regions, including Greece and Germany in Europe, Lebanon and Yemen in the Middle East, Malawi and Kenya in Africa, Bangladesh and the Maldives in South Asia, and Venezuela and the countries of Central America's Northern Triangle in the Americas. Although these cases demonstrate the global nature of the climate migration problem through differing regional contexts, each also presents unique settings, challenges, and responses. These geographically disparate examples further serve to examine the responsibilities of stakeholders and finally to develop strategies designed to address and mitigate the impact of climate stress on children on the move.

The Climate Resilience Model below helps explain the multi-faceted and continuous pattern of migration impacts through the lens of equity, adaptability and advocacy, resource distribution, resulting trauma and displacement, education responses, policy reformation, appropriate financing, and preparedness. This model will be used to explain the complex interrelationships found in many climate migration cases (Fig. 1).

This model is meant as a tool for identifying the many interworking systems involved in climate and migration experiences, policies, and injustices. For policymakers and academics alike, the model can be a valuable tool for recognizing neighboring issues and how global processes shape individual lives.

Fig. 1. The Climate Resilience Model.



CONTEXT

To understand better the complexity of climate events, displacement, and migration, one should first understand the different categories that United Nations’ agencies use to differentiate among displaced people. Because such status classifications have weighty legal implications, which may constrain the assistance provided by national governments and the larger international community, it is critical that classifications are universally understood and accepted. Since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have both reported that global displacements of people due to climate events are expected to rise, they and other international organizations must have terminology and categorization that enable them to work well together and work effectively with all other UN agencies and their national counterparts involved in the climate crisis.

It is also important to note that there is difficulty in quantifying the exact number of people migrating or displaced due to climate change because there is limited reliable and accurate data available. Without adequate monitoring and stringent accountability, the magnitude and impact of any disaster are difficult to fully comprehend, and displacement and associated difficulties are estimated to be much greater than reported. The literature does reveal

though that children are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change than adults (Currie & Deschenes, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that environmental issues are responsible for more than one-third of deaths among children under 14 (Prüs-Üstün & Corlaván, 2006). Exacerbating the situation, children exposed to climate events are potentially also exposed to mental health challenges associated with trauma and stress (Pörtner et al., 2022).

There appear to be only a few cases where climate change is the sole factor prompting migration, the most notable of which are in the Pacific Ocean islands. For example, the small island states of Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Maldives are clearly in danger of rising waters, and the reality that those countries will eventually be submerged into the sea has existential implications for the people who live there today. These extreme situations have prompted the urgency to seek agreements with other countries if relocation of their citizens becomes inevitable (Worland, 2019). Although these instances make visible the threat posed by climate change, they will not be the only situations that result in life-altering circumstances for mankind, many of which are not well understood or accurately assessed.

There are a host of cases where the confluence of climate disasters is linked to other issues, producing highly complex threats. For example, in 2021 alone, there were approximately 5.9 million people displaced because of disasters of all kinds across 84 countries and territories (IDMC, 2021, p. 16). While disasters are responsible for more than 60% of the internal displacements documented in 2021, 94% of those were weather-related events (IDMC, 2021, p. 20). Sub-Saharan Africa may have as many as 85 million climate-related migrants by 2050 (Lindsay, 2021). Drought in several African regions caused approximately 240,000 displacements and further contributed to other events such as wildfires (Lindsay, 2021). The eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano in the Democratic Republic of Congo caused the displacement of about 599,000 citizens (IDMC, 2021, p. 16). In the countries of Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria, climate events created many new and worsened other displacements. In Afghanistan and Iran, displacements were caused by both extreme droughts and floods. At the same time, Iraq experienced both water shortages and drought. Yemen, which is already under a dire humanitarian situation, experienced extreme flooding in 2020, resulting in diseases such as cholera, dengue, malaria, and diphtheria. Typhoons displaced significant numbers of people in China and the Philippines in the same year.