



SDG 4
Youth &
Student
Network

YOUTH CALL TO ACTION: Protecting the right to education amid climate change and displacement

*Developed by the SDG4 Youth and Student Network**

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**This document was developed by members of the [SDG4 Youth & Student Network](#). The ideas and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.*

Building on [UNESCO Initiative on Examining the Impact of Climate Change on the Right to Education](#), the Youth Call to Action: Protecting the right to education amid climate change and displacement, translates key policy recommendations of [UNESCO's 2023 global report Learning at risk: The impact of climate displacement on education](#) into concrete, youth-driven advocacy. The Youth Call to Action amplifies young people's priorities in safeguarding the right to education, with particular attention to students who are forcibly displaced due to climate change-related disasters.

Introduction: The urgency of action

The climate crisis is no longer just an environmental challenge; it is rapidly becoming one of the greatest threats to the right to education.

In 2024 alone, 45.8 million internal disaster displacements were recorded across 163 countries and territories.¹ Nearly one billion children, almost half of the world's children, live in areas facing high risks of climate and environmental shocks, placing their right to education under sustained and escalating risk of disruption.² These numbers reflect classrooms washed away, learning that stops overnight, and young people whose futures are pushed further out of reach. In 2024, at least 242 million students experienced school disruptions due to climate events³, with an estimated USD 35.9 billion lost annually as schools are damaged, destroyed, or forced to close.⁴ For many, these are not one-off events but repeated shocks that deepen vulnerability and expose the systemic fragility of education systems.

Box 1: Regional snapshots of climate impacts on education

In 2024, South Asia was the most affected region, with 128 million students experiencing climate-related school disruptions, followed by East Asia and the Pacific where 50 million students were impacted

In the Amazon region of South America, severe drought has made more than 1,700 schools inaccessible, disrupting education for Indigenous and remote communities.

In 2024, devastating floods and landslides across Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia affected at least 600,000 children, further disrupting access to education for already vulnerable learners.

The impacts are most severe for the most vulnerable populations, as climate change both creates and exacerbates existing inequalities based on gender, disability, migration status, and socioeconomic background, pushing education further out of reach when it is needed most. With 133 million girls out

¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) [2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#)

² UNICEF (2024). [Learning interrupted Global snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024](#)

³ UNICEF (2024). [Learning interrupted Global snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024](#)

⁴ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Management (2025). [Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2025: Resilience Pays: Financing and Investing for our Future](#).

of school worldwide⁵, many face early marriage, caregiving responsibilities, and heightened risks of gender-based violence, while socioeconomic pressures make it difficult for displaced and low-income learners to afford basic education costs.⁶ This reality makes one thing clear: addressing the links between climate change and the right to education can no longer be optional.

Protecting the right to education is urgent and essential to securing a more just, resilient, and sustainable future, and calls for action from Member States, the private sector, and educational institutions, in close collaboration with young people, as co-creators.

Youth and students' recommendations

In the face of the climate crisis, education must remain a global priority. This policy brief calls for global, regional and national action across three key areas to ensure that climate-displaced learners, including trapped populations, can access inclusive and equitable quality education, in full alignment with Agenda 2030, specifically Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Recommendation 1:
Enshrine an explicit recognition of the right to education of climate-displaced people

Education is recognized as a fundamental human right for all, without distinction, under the international law. Yet this protection has a critical gap: climate-displaced people hold no legally recognized status under international law and are explicitly excluded from the definition of refugee under the 1951 Convention. Consequently, they fall outside the specific education protections of Article 22 and lack access to any comparable legal framework. For those displaced across borders, this gap translates directly into legal and administrative barriers to schooling- barriers that no child or young person should face. Closing this gap requires explicit legal recognition of the right to education for climate-displaced people at the global, regional, and national levels.

Therefore, we, as youth and students' representatives, make the following recommendations to enshrine an explicit recognition of the right to education of climate-displaced people:

- **Establish legal recognition and protection for cross-border climate displacement:** Adopt legislative reforms at the international level to recognize a specific legal status for people displaced across borders because of climate change. This status should explicitly protect their fundamental rights, including the right to education.
- **Strengthen legal recognition and protection for internally displaced persons:** Enshrine a definition of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at the national and regional level that explicitly includes people displaced due to climate change. Where such a definition already

⁵ UIS and GEM Report Team (2025). [SDG4 scorecard progress report on national benchmarks: focus on the out-of-school rate](#)

⁶ UNICEF (Girls' Education). [Girls' education, Gender equality in education benefits every child](#)

exists, it should be expanded accordingly and accompanied by clear rights and entitlements, including access to education.

Recommendation 2:
Ensure the continuity of learning and access to inclusive and equitable education during and after climate emergencies

Climate-displaced people face barriers to education that are numerous, interconnected and mutually reinforcing. At the infrastructure level, disasters destroy schools and sever access routes, delaying reopening for months and leaving learners without viable alternatives. But the barriers extend well beyond the physical: displaced learners routinely encounter language barriers, overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and administrative hurdles – including missing documentation unrecognized qualifications - that block re-enrolment even when schools are open.

These challenges fall hardest on those already most vulnerable. For low-income households displaced from climate-sensitive livelihoods - in agriculture, fisheries or tourism - the economic shocks compound the educational one. Girls and women face heightened risks of gender-based violence and early marriage, which pull them out of learning environments entirely. Linguistic and cultural minorities navigate systems not designed for them, Persons with disabilities, who already encounter structural exclusions from essential services, face compounding disadvantage in displacement settings where adaptive infrastructure and support services are the first to disappear.

Taken together, these barriers do not merely disrupt education, they sever it. Without deliberate, inclusive policy intervention, displacement becomes a permanent exit from learning for the populations least able to absorb that loss.

Therefore, we, as youth and students' representatives, make the following recommendations to ensure continued and inclusive learning in climate emergencies and climate-induced displacement:

- **Integrate and prioritize education within disaster risk reduction and management policies and plans:** Prioritization of education in disaster risk reduction and management policies and plans, through the development of continuity of learning strategies and planning during and after displacement, and the establishment of rapid-recovery mechanisms that would allow students to return to school as soon as possible, ensuring minimal learning loss and deterioration of basic skills.
- **Address barriers to access education:** Remove bureaucratic barriers for climate-displaced learners by reforming enrolment policies, digitalizing academic records, and recognizing prior learning across borders. Expand financial support through conditional cash transfers, grants, and scholarships to eliminate education costs and prevent dropout. Implement psychosocial, trauma-informed, and community-based learner support to ensure safe, inclusive participation in learning.
- **Support and expand distance and flexible learning solutions:** Expand and institutionalize inclusive distance learning solutions, including low-tech solutions, to ensure continuity of learning when access to physical learning spaces is disrupted, for example by providing

learning kits and scaling up TV and radio instruction, while prioritizing the safe and timely return to face-to-face teaching as soon as conditions allow.

- **Ensure inclusive approaches across all measures:** Implement inclusive approaches to support all marginalized and vulnerable groups amongst climate-displaced learners, such as gender-responsive bridging and catch-up programmes, accelerated education programmes, and community-based learning that enable climate-displaced learners to re-enter or continue schooling without prolonged disruption, while embedding integration mechanisms that address cultural and linguistic barriers, prevent discrimination, and provide psychosocial support to ensure seamless transition and sustained enrolment.

**Recommendation 3:
Strengthen youth participation and leadership to protect the right to education for
climate-displaced people**

The [2022 Youth Declaration on Transforming Education](#), affirms what too few policy processes reflect in practice: young people are not merely beneficiaries of education systems, they are agents of the transformation. Developed through an inclusive and representative youth-led consultative process spanning regions and communities worldwide, the Declaration positions young people as leaders of today and tomorrow, with the agency to act, innovate and ensure every learner has access to equitable and inclusive education.

Extracts from the 2022 Youth Declaration on Transforming Education

Article 10: “We demand decision-makers to eradicate all legal, financial, and systemic barriers preventing all learners, particularly migrant, refugee, and displaced youth, from accessing and fully participating in education - such as lack of recognition of prior learning, lack of recognition of academic documents, barriers related to transitioning from one level of education to another, and more;”

Article 24: “We particularly call upon decision-makers to increase funding for education during and after emergencies in the adversely affected regions and territories through official development assistance, humanitarian aid, public financing, and others until all children and youth have equitable access to quality education, particularly girls and young women, refugees, and displaced persons”

Therefore, we, as youth and students’ representatives, call for the strengthening of youth leadership and participation in protecting the right to education for climate-displaced learners:

- **Establish formal youth advisory councils:** Establish formal youth advisory councils and ensure dedicated youth representation within existing education and climate advisory bodies that feed directly into national and local education-in-emergencies policy processes and responses to ensure that youth perspectives, especially those of high-risk communities, inform decision-making before, during and post-crisis.
- **Invest in youth leadership:** Invest in youth leadership training, mentorship, and capacity-building programmes enabling young people to contribute to the co-design, implementation and monitoring of education continuity measures and innovative approaches in climate displacement contexts, and to effectively engage with policymakers and community stakeholders.

Critical conditions for protecting the right to education for climate displaced people

The right to inclusive and equitable quality education for climate-displaced people requires adequate financing for education systems, including integration into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and strengthened Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Enhancing climate literacy among all groups- including displaced, trapped, and host communities- is crucial for successfully carrying out the recommendations. This should involve both formal climate education within schools and expanded learning opportunities outside the classroom to ensure broad and effective understanding. Together, these conditions ensure that the right to education for climate-displaced people is actively protected and fulfilled.

Condition 1: Adequate financing for education

Global education systems face a critical financing gap that undermines their ability to deliver quality education and build climate resilience. Low-income countries spend an average of US\$55 per learner annually, compared to US\$8,532 in high-income countries, leaving an estimated annual gap of US\$97 billion to achieve SDG 4 by 2030.⁷ Early school leaving from climate impacts threatens further losses in lifetime earnings and economic development. Targeted investments in resilient, inclusive education systems are essential.

Therefore, we, as youth and students' representatives, call on governments, with support from bilateral donors, multilateral agencies, NGOs, and the private sector, to prioritize education financing by ensuring:

- **Increased investments in resilient infrastructure and learning continuity:** Increase domestic and international funding for climate-resilient school infrastructure, including disaster-proof buildings and learning materials, alongside investment in education-in-emergencies programmes such as catch-up classes, psychosocial support, and remote learning solutions, to ensure learning continues despite displacement or school closures.
- **Investment in teacher capacity and systemic strengthening:** Invest in teacher recruitment, training, and support, particularly in climate-affected regions, while strengthening education

⁷ UNESCO (2025) [#FundEducation](#)

systems through improved planning, management, and monitoring of climate-responsive interventions to enhance learning outcomes and equity for all learners.

Box 2: Financing for Education: Integrating education into Nationally Determined Contributions 3.0

Education receives only 1.5 per cent of global climate finance yet is critical to mitigating climate impacts and enabling effective government response.⁸ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the primary mechanism through which countries commit to climate action and access climate financing, offer a pathway to unlock dedicated education investment. By integrating education into NDCs and National Adaptation Plans, governments can strengthen educational systems as a low-cost climate adaptation measure and protect the right to education for climate-displaced learners.

Several countries have recognised this opportunity, including Kenya, Somalia, Solomon Islands, Cambodia, and Nepal.⁹ However, broader integration is needed. We call on governments to prioritise education in their NDC 3.0 updates, framing education as a cross-cutting enabler of climate resilience and equitable development, to unlock the financing necessary for inclusive, climate-responsive education systems.

Condition 2: Integrating climate change education in schools and in lifelong learning opportunities

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) equips learners with knowledge, skills, and values to address global sustainability challenges, including climate change, while nurturing global citizenship and understanding of climate justice, human rights, and peace, in line with SDG Target 4.7. However, critical gaps undermine progress: 47 per cent of national curricula frameworks omit climate change, and only 40 per cent of teachers feel confident teaching climate action, limiting climate literacy across all populations, particularly displaced and host communities.¹⁰

The Greening Education Partnership demonstrates the power of a whole-of-system approach: integrating climate education across curricula, teacher training, schools, and communities creates multiple outcomes, equipping learners with green skills for low-carbon livelihoods, fostering civic engagement and behavioural change, and transforming educational systems into drivers of climate resilience. For climate-displaced learners, climate-responsive education is critical to recovery, social integration, and livelihood adaptation.

Therefore, we, as youth and students' representatives, call on governments and education partners to strengthen climate change education by:

⁸ UNESCO (2024) [Global Education Meeting Background Document](#)

⁹ Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (2025). [School Safety in the Climate Crisis A Call for Action in Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa](#)

¹⁰ UNESCO (2021) [Getting every school climate-ready: how countries are integrating climate change issues in education](#)

- **Integrating climate education into core curricula:** Embed climate justice, green skills, disaster preparedness, and global citizenship into curricula at all levels to equip learners with competencies for resilience and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Investing in teacher capacity:** Provide sustained professional development to build teacher confidence and competency in delivering climate and sustainability education effectively across diverse contexts.
- **Expanding climate literacy beyond schools:** Support non-formal and community-based learning initiatives that extend climate education to out-of-school populations, families, and host communities, fostering participation in locally relevant sustainability action.
- **Adopting whole-of-system approaches:** Implement greening initiatives that connect classroom learning with school-wide sustainability practices, teacher training, and community partnerships to reinforce learning retention and drive behavioural change.

A collective call to protect the right to education climate-displaced learners

Nearly one billion children live in high-risk climate zones. Millions have already lost their education to displacement. The right to education cannot be optional.

We call on governments, donors, and institutions to place education at the centre of every climate policy and financing framework, prioritizing climate-displaced learners who face the greatest barriers with the least support. This demands bold political commitment, sustained investment, and youth partnership in building resilient systems that keep learning alive before, during, and after climate emergencies.

The time to act is now!