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# What Kind of Education in Times of Climate Migration?

## Abstract

The climate and environment emergency caused by human-generated greenhouse gas emissions presents significant global challenges, including rising temperatures, extreme weather conditions, and sea level rise. These effects impact agriculture, water resources, human health, and biodiversity, while also exacerbating socio-economic vulnerabilities. Climate migration, driven by these environmental changes, will reshape societies and challenge access to education for displaced populations. In response, education systems must adapt, promoting environmental justice, inclusivity, and resilience, while equipping future generations with the skills needed for a sustainable future.

**Keywords:** climate and environment emergency, climate migrants, education, justice.

## 1. Introduction – A climate and environment emergency

If you turn on the news on TV or radio, check online services, or traditionally open a printed newspaper, there is a good chance you'll come across information about droughts and wildfires (Russia, Canada, Australia) or extreme weather events, such as heavy rainfall causing floods (Central Europe, Pakistan, Afghanistan) or hurricanes (USA). Climate emergency caused by human-generated greenhouse gas emissions presents significant global challenges (Francis, 2015; Stanisoara, 2014; Shivanna, 2022; Thunberg, 2023). The impacts include

higher temperatures, extreme weather conditions, and rising sea levels, which affect agriculture, water resources, and human health (Levy & Patz, 2015; Campbell et al., 2007). Climate emergency also endangers biodiversity and the stability of ecosystems (Shivanna, 2022). Psychologically, the crisis leads to eco-emotions such as anxiety and grief (Kegyes, 2023). Research indicates that while young people recognize the severity of the climate crisis, many feel pessimistic about its resolution (Cywiński, 2023).

Despite growing awareness, profound changes in political and economic systems are urgently required to effectively confront the climate emergency (Gills & Morgan, 2020). Recent studies underscore the growing acknowledgment of climate change as an urgent issue, with many governments and organizations declaring climate emergencies (Dillon, 2019; Cretney & Nissen, 2022). According to EU terminology, we are operating in a climate and environment emergency (European Parliament resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environment emergency, 2019). In accordance with the content of the Paris Agreement, the signatories committed to efforts to: „Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change”<sup>1</sup>. It’s worth fighting for: the increase in the number of heatwave days will lead to a rise in heat-related morbidity and mortality, especially among the elderly, children, and in regions with weak healthcare infrastructure and limited adaptive capacity (Liu et al., 2017).

International efforts to limit global warming, current projections indicate that temperatures may rise beyond the targeted levels (Shivanna, 2022). Tackling climate emergency demands urgent actions like reducing emissions, expanding forested areas, and possibly considering geoengineering as a last resort (Gabric, 2023). The humanities play a vital role in exploring the social and cultural effects of climate crisis (Leggewie & Welzer, 2010; Pathania & Bala, 2024). Implementing an emergency approach at the local level poses challenges and may reinforce existing political structures (Nissen & Cretney, 2021). Addressing this crisis demands a connection between health, social, and climate justice, alongside transformative activism (Bellizzi, Lane, Elhakim, Nabeth, 2020; Rouf & Wainwright, 2020).

In conclusion, we are in a very difficult situation. This Synthesis Report (SYR) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicates: „Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above

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<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the agreement reached was the result of a broad consensus among political leaders: [https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris\\_nov\\_2015/application/pdf/paris\\_agreement\\_english\\_.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf)

1850–1900 in 2011–2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals (high confidence)<sup>2</sup>. The climate and environment emergency, driven by human-generated greenhouse gas emissions, has led to rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and threats to biodiversity, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and low-income countries. Urgent actions, including emission reductions and systemic political and economic changes, are necessary to confront these challenges, with many governments and organizations already recognizing the severity of the crisis.

## **2. Human rights and climate and environment emergency**

As mentioned in the introduction, the situation is difficult. This also affects the observance of human rights. Before we move on to this topic, a fundamental assumption must be made, namely, Rebecca Bratspies notes: „The idea that there is a set of inalienable, universal rights to which all are entitled simply by virtue of being human stands out as perhaps the most significant achievement of twentieth-century international jurisprudence” (Bratspies, 2015, p. 39), which in short means: all people have subjectivity, we are the heirs of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948.

Rebecca Bratspies climate crisis is causing widespread environmental degradation, which in turn is threatening the realization of internationally recognized human rights, including the right to life, health, culture, food, and self-determination. Environmental harm disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable populations, making it a social justice issue. The poorest will suffer first and most from the consequences of climate change, but ultimately, all people will be affected. Current international environmental laws are inadequate in addressing transboundary environmental harms. They are often aspirational and lack enforceable obligations. A human rights approach could fill these gaps by imposing more concrete obligations on states. The connection between human rights and climate change is increasingly seen as crucial, with numerous scholars pointing to the significant effects climate change has on fundamental rights (Bratspies, 2015). John K. Knox (2017), focusing on the issue of biodiversity, points out that is crucial for the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water, and culture. The destruction of biodiversity endangers these rights and exacerbates human suffering, especially

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize the significance of the IPCC as the most reliable and competent source regarding the issue of the climate crisis: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>.

among vulnerable populations. In the same spirit expresses Barry S. Levy and Jonathan A. Patz: consequences disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and low-income countries, raising concerns about human rights and social justice (Levy & Patz, 2015). Adelman (2014) explores the legitimacy of using human rights frameworks to address climate challenges, calling for the recognition of ecocide as a criminal offense. Savaresi and Setzer (2022) highlight the importance of rights-based litigation in addressing climate emergencies, while Knox (2009) advocates for applying human rights law to address global environmental damage.

The Declaration on Human Rights and Climate Change, introduced by scholars from the Global Network for the Study of Human Rights and the Environment (GNHRE), aims to address climate injustices and human hierarchies inherent in the climate crisis. It emphasizes the intrinsic connection between human rights and environmental integrity, advocating for accountability from states, corporations, and individuals responsible for climate-related harms. The Declaration promotes a rights-based approach that integrates Western and non-Western epistemologies, focusing on the protection of human and non-human entities, with particular attention to vulnerable populations such as indigenous peoples, women, and future generations (Davies et al., 2017).

### 3. Climate migrants

Estimates of the number of climate migrants by 2050 vary greatly, ranging from 25 million to over 1 billion people (Bassetti, 2019). Several hundred million people will have to relocate due to rising sea levels (Geisler & Currens, 2017). It is predicted in “World Migration Report 2024” of International Organization for Migration (IOM), that by 2050, 216 million people will be internal migrants within their own countries due to climate-related reasons (McAuliffe, M. & L.A. Oucho, 2024, p. 7). One of the main conclusions of this publication is that climate crisis interacts with food insecurity and socio-economic vulnerabilities, leading to migration. But what is more shocking, Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) predicts that around 1.2 billion people could be displaced by 2050 from this reasons. The Institute indicates that the countries facing the most ecological threats include Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Chad, India, and Pakistan, and Regions most at risk: Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. More than 1 billion people live in countries that lack sufficient resources to cope with future ecological shocks<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, by 2040, over 5.4 billion people will live in countries experiencing high or extreme water stress, and by 2050, the number of people at risk of food insecurity could rise to 3.5 billion: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Ecological-Threat-Register-Press-Release-27.08-FINAL.pdf>

However, an equally alarming statement comes from Gaia Vince, which indicates that many areas in the Global South will become uninhabitable, leading to both internal and cross-continental mass migrations. She notes that the middle of the 21st century, even 3.5 billion people will live in areas that become too hot or humid to survive. Tropical countries such as Bangladesh, Sudan, and India will be the most affected. She states firmly that we will need to organize migration on an unprecedented scale to help people move to regions with more bearable climate conditions, such as northern Europe, Canada, Siberia, and the Arctic. Vince suggests that migration will not only change geography but also how we perceive each other. We will have to abandon national and ethnic divisions in favor of a global identity, which will be essential for survival in the new climate order (Vince, 2023).

Considering the above, in terms of Climate, Environmental, and Social Justice, it must be stated that we will likely face the deprivation of this good (justice) and witness violent and brutal transformations unless we restructure our world in the socio-political dimension.

#### **4. Climate migrants and their access to education**

The data presented so far aimed to show the nature and scale of the problem. At this point, I would like to pose the following research question: What kind of education in times of climate migration?"

According to Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity"<sup>4</sup>.

Now, the global refugee crisis has significantly affected access to education, particularly for displaced children and youth. While primary education garners more attention, refugees face substantial challenges in accessing secondary and higher education (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Anselme & Hands, 2010). Migrant education encounters many challenges, such as access barriers, interruptions in schooling, and lower academic performance compared to native peers (Entorf, 2015). In South Africa, refugee children encounter obstacles in both enrolling in and continuing their education (Meda, Sookrajh, Maharaj, 2012). Similarly, Sudanese refugees in Egypt struggle with legal and financial barriers to education (Moro, 2002). Despite these difficulties, education is essential for safeguarding refugee children and instilling hope for their future (Crisp, Talbot, Cipollone, 2001). Technological innovations like mobile phones and online platforms pre-

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<sup>4</sup> The significance of the convention lies in the fact that it has been ratified by a record number of countries: <https://www.unicef.org/media/52626/file>

sent promising ways to broaden educational opportunities for refugees (Moser-Mercer, Hayba, Goldsmith, 2018). Addressing these issues requires increased funding, policy reforms, and creative strategies to ensure refugees have access to quality education at all levels (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Anselme & Hands, 2010; Moser-Mercer et al., 2018).

The educational consequences of child migration are multidimensional: migrant children often show lower academic performance compared to their peers from the majority population, which may indicate a correlation between educational outcomes and socio-economic status. They also tend to attend lower-performing schools or are overrepresented in vocational schools, which can limit their future educational and career opportunities (Brind, Harper, Moore, 2008). Despite numerous efforts, the education of migrant and climate refugee children faces persistent, often insurmountable challenges, including legal, financial, and systemic barriers. Even with technological advancements and policy reforms, the complexity of ensuring continuous, equitable access to education for displaced populations remains a largely unresolved issue.

## 5. Summary – possible future scenarios

The Salamanca Statement emphasizing the importance of creating educational systems that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of all students<sup>5</sup>. And the report “Education for all 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges” indicates that if countries fail to take measures to integrate migrant children, they risk facing further marginalization<sup>6</sup>, what should be analyzed in relation to the second Millennium Development Goal: achieving universal primary education<sup>7</sup>. According to the report “The climate crisis is a child rights crisis” education is identified as a key factor in mitigating and adapting to climate risks. The report calls for climate-resilient education systems that not only teach children about climate science but also equip them with green skills for the future economy<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> However, this act, despite being 30 years old, remains relevant to this day: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>

<sup>6</sup> The report identifies employment as a reason for remaining outside the education system: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232205>

<sup>7</sup> A total of eight goals were identified: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education, to promote gender equality and empower women, to reduce child mortality, to improve maternal health, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, to ensure environmental sustainability, and to develop a global partnership for development: [https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015\\_MDG\\_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Investment in sustainable education is seen as crucial for empowering children to participate in climate resilience efforts: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614506.pdf>

In response to the question posed above: "What kind of education in times of climate migration?" we have two scenarios to consider: a) unifying, b) diversifying.

In answering this question, we must consider the data presented above: we are facing an unprecedented challenge to which the entire human race must respond. Most likely, in a relatively short time, the socio-political order of the world will change. Mass migrations will affect all dimensions of functioning for nation-states. All of them. This is the subject of Gaia Vince's book "Nomad Century: How Climate Migration Will Reshape Our World" (2023). Ensuring universal education for children, as highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, should be a key concern, as mentioned by Pope Francis in his encyclical "Laudato Si'" (2015). This reflects the perspective of viewing the Earth as a common home. As for the content of education itself, considering the situation humanity finds itself in, we should place particular emphasis on the statement in "Article 29. 1. (e) The development of respect for the natural environment" from the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the case of the predicted migration northward, including into Poland, I advocate for a single form of education for everyone, rejecting a model where local children receive one type of education and climate migrants another. This should be an education that prepares humanity for the reverse process, namely the re-settlement of areas that were abandoned due to climate reasons.

If the education of the near and distant future is to simultaneously serve diversity, equity, and inclusion, then its (education's) main component, due to the importance of the issue, should be justice, as a universally shared value, almost embedded in our DNA, but currently, in the context of climate, essentially dormant. Sunita Narain points out: "The fact is that we have lost precious time in finding 'smart' ways to do as little as possible to reduce greenhouse emissions, and it is time to take decisive and bold steps. We need to build policies knowing that we live in an interdependent world where cooperation that is driven by fairness and justice is critical" (Thunberg, 2023, p. 439). Naomi Klein, writing about a just climate transition, through which it will be possible to build a fair society, she advocates five principles that should be adopted: a) energy democracy – shifting from centralized, corporate-controlled fossil fuel systems to decentralized, community-controlled renewable energy sources, b) front lines first: the communities most affected by climate crisis should build new green infrastructure and rehabilitate lands, c) care work is climate work – care work (such as teaching, caregiving, and healthcare) as critical to a low-carbon economy. These jobs should be valued and supported in a just transition, d) no worker left behind – workers in carbon-intensive industries are supported with retraining and guaranteed incomes, so they are not left behind as the economy shifts away from fossil fuels, f) polluter pays – those who have profited the most

from pollution, particularly fossil fuel corporations and wealthy individuals, should bear the financial burden of the transition to a green economy (Thunberg, 2023, p. 546–553). Klein concludes: “it offers integrated and intersecting solutions grounded in a clear and compelling vision of our future – one that is ecologically safe, economically fair and socially just” (Thunberg, 2023, p. 552–553), Hilda Flavia Nakabuye: “There cannot be sustainability without equity, and there cannot be equity without sustainability. Climate justice must manifest everywhere, for everyone” (Thunberg, 2023, p. 557), and Mitzi Jonelle Tan: “Together, we fight for land into a greener society and for a world with a united community full of love and cooperation. This is what we mean when we talk about equity. Equity is justice. Equity is liberation. Equity is what we need, so there is no choice but to fight back” (Thunberg, 2023, p. 561). It is an articulated program for future education, a set of goals that it should serve. It is the opening of education to environmental justice, meaning equal access to a clean environment, and multispecies justice – concerning the relationship between nature and humans, as well as spatial justice, which relates to urban space management and the democratic decision-making process in this area (Celermajer et al., 2021; Costanza-Chock, 2020; Fainstein, 2009; Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2009; Schlosberg, 2007; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Soja, 2009; Soja, 2010).

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## Jaki rodzaj edukacji w czasach migracji klimatycznej?

### Streszczenie

Kryzys klimatyczny i środowiskowy, spowodowany emisją gazów cieplarnianych wytwarzanych przez człowieka, stawia przed światem poważne wyzwania, takie jak wzrost temperatur, ekstremalne zjawiska pogodowe oraz podnoszenie się poziomu mórz. Te zmiany wpływają na rolnictwo, zasoby wodne, zdrowie ludzi oraz bioróżnorodność, jednocześnie pogłębiając nierówności społeczno-ekonomiczne. Migracja klimatyczna wywołana tymi zmianami środowiskowymi przekształci społeczeństwa i stworzy nowe wyzwania związane z dostępem do edukacji dla przemieszczonych społeczności. W odpowiedzi, systemy edukacyjne muszą się dostosować, promując sprawiedliwość środowiskową, inkluzywność i odporność, jednocześnie wyposażając przyszłe pokolenia w umiejętności potrzebne do zrównoważonej przyszłości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryzys klimatyczny i środowiskowy, migranci klimatyczni, edukacja, sprawiedliwość.