

Tracing Child Migrants' Educational Trajectories Amidst Climate Disruptions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Evidence from the DARE Research Consortium

Policy Brief

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ABOUT

This policy brief was produced by the DARE Research Consortium. It summarises the findings from a full report (forthcoming) detailing research conducted as part of the DARE-RC portfolio, and was authored by the researchers of that report. This brief forms a part of a series to provide actionable evidence to policymakers in Pakistan to improve education.

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Seher Aftab, Sevim Saadat and Ali Imtinan

Methodology

- **Design:** qualitative, participatory research combining human rights, intersectionality and educational resilience perspectives; climate migration from 2022 onwards, ages 5–19.
- **Methods:** 44 semi-structured interviews, 17 FGDs, 14 KIIs, and 25 stakeholder consultation participants across four KP locations, November 2025.

Key Figures

250,000

children displaced in KP after the 2022 and 2025 floods

4

research locations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

1.5 yrs

a child was kept out of school due to lost records

9/42

previously school-going participants dropped out post-migration

160

students per teacher in one government girls' school

90

max class size in destination areas, vs 55 in origin

Findings

1

Access varies sharply by location and reason

Affordability, distance, livelihood pressures, and gender norms each dominate as the main barrier in different areas.

2

Documentation and enrolment rules create serious barriers

Especially for seasonal migrants; in one case, lost records kept a child out of school for 1.5 years.

3

Dropouts rise sharply after migration

Driven by distance, unaffordability, and rigid admission rules that don't recognise a school-leaving certificate from elsewhere.

4

Repeated migration and language barriers weaken learning

Seasonal migrants face cyclical disruption; permanent migrants can take months to gain enough language proficiency to follow lessons.

5

Teacher shortages and overcrowding undermine learning

One teacher for 160 students in one school; girls particularly affected by inadequate washrooms.

6

Communities often step in where the system fails

But this support is inconsistent and depends on local goodwill rather than something families everywhere can rely on.

Policy Implications

- KP needs mobility-responsive education governance – existing policies assume stable, geographically fixed student populations.
- Access alone is insufficient – corresponding investment is needed in retention, progression, learning quality, and psychosocial wellbeing.
- The education system's response to climate events must move beyond reconstruction to restoring disrupted educational trajectories.
- Upcoming KP education policy and planning frameworks need dedicated priorities, targets, and responses for climate-induced child migrants.

Recommendations

SHORT-TERM · 0–12 MONTHS

Make the System Mobility-Responsive

- Introduce flexible enrolment and re-entry rules for climate migrants.
- Establish a portable student record system via EMIS.
- Deploy mobile registration units in migrant-hosting areas.

MEDIUM-TERM · 1–3 YEARS

Plan for Migrant-Hosting Areas

- Map migrant settlements into district education planning and teacher allocation.
- Expand subsidies and Girls Community Schools in high-need areas.
- Train teachers in the local languages migrant children speak.

LONG-TERM · 3–5 YEARS

Coordinate & Institutionalise

- Activate interdepartmental coordination on climate migration.
- Institutionalise continuous evidence generation on CCM needs.

Key Messages

250,000 children were displaced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after the 2022 and 2025 floods, but this figure only captures temporary displacement. It misses the longer-term seasonal and permanent migration that climate change is driving. This brief explores what happens to these children's education afterward, and what KP can do to respond well.

Migration's effect on access to education varies sharply by location and reason for exclusion: affordability, distance, livelihood pressures, and gender norms each dominate in different areas. Documentation and enrolment rules create serious barriers, especially for seasonal migrants. In one case, lost records kept a child out of school for 1.5 years. Discrimination compounds this further, for instance for girls and Afghan-origin migrants.

Dropouts rise sharply after migration, driven by distance, unaffordability, and especially for seasonal migrants, rigid admission rules that do not recognise a school-leaving certificate from elsewhere. Repeated seasonal migration disrupts learning cyclically, while permanent migrants often face language barriers in destination areas, sometimes taking months to gain enough proficiency to follow lessons.

When children do stay enrolled, teacher shortages (e.g. one teacher for 160 students), overcrowded classrooms, and corporal punishment undermine learning, with girls particularly affected by inadequate washrooms. Discrimination and “othering” by peers cause psychosocial harm and disengagement, though supportive teachers and peers can make a meaningful difference.

Despite the barriers, children show strong motivation to keep learning, and where the system fails, communities often step in to help sustain access. But this support is inconsistent and depends on local goodwill rather than being something families everywhere can rely on.

Addressing this starts with making the system itself mobility-responsive: introducing flexible enrolment and re-entry rules for migrant children, creating a portable student record system so records move with the child, and using mobile registration units to reach migrant-hosting areas directly.



Introduction

Pakistan ranked first amongst countries most affected by extreme weather events in 2022 (Climate Risk Index 2025) and highest in Asia on the Children's Climate Risk Index (UNICEF 2021). In Pakistan, climate events displaced eight million people in 2022, and three million in 2025, half of whom are children (IDMC 2023; UNOCHA 2025). Projections for 2050 suggest millions more will become climate migrants in Pakistan, yet national and provincial level understanding on climate-induced child migrants' (CCMs) experiences in access, continuity, and quality of education remains limited.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains at the frontline of the climate crisis in Pakistan, faced with intensifying climate events, extreme weather in its mountainous terrain and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs). Following the 2022 and 2025 floods, over 250,000 children aged 6–17 were displaced (Islamic Relief 2022; UNOCHA 2025). While these numbers capture temporary displacement from the floods, they do not account for subsequent climate-induced migration, including long-term permanent migration patterns, as well as repeated seasonal migration.

This brief provides evidence to close the gap and strengthen existing frameworks to respond to CCM needs. Aligned with Priority Area Three: Resilient Education Service Delivery of DARE-RC's Research Agenda, this brief draws from the study titled 'Tracing Child Migrants' Education Access, Continuity, and Quality Amidst Climate-Induced Disruptions in Pakistan'.

Study Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design, using a participatory approach centring the voices and lived experiences of climate-induced child migrants (CCMs). It is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework, combining human rights, intersectionality, and educational resilience perspectives.

Scope: CCMs are defined as children who moved from their habitual place of residence due to rapid-onset (floods) or slow-onset (erratic snowfall, droughts) climate events. The temporal scope focuses on climate migration from 2022 onwards, with participants aged 5–19.

Methods: A desk review; 44 participants engaged through Semi-Structured Interviews; 17 participants engaged through Focus Group Discussions; 14 Key Informant Interviews with teachers, local leaders and officials; and 25 participants engaged through multi-stakeholder consultations, including KPESED and KP PDMA.

Data Collection: Fieldwork was conducted in November 2025 in four research locations in KP: Chitral Colony, Peshawar; Tarnab, Charsadda; Shah Maqsood, Haripur; and Hamsherian, Mansehra.

250,000

CHILDREN DISPLACED

In KP after the 2022 and 2025 floods, aged 6–17

“*Climate migration should not only be seen as a humanitarian or disaster-management issue – it is a structural education governance challenge.*”

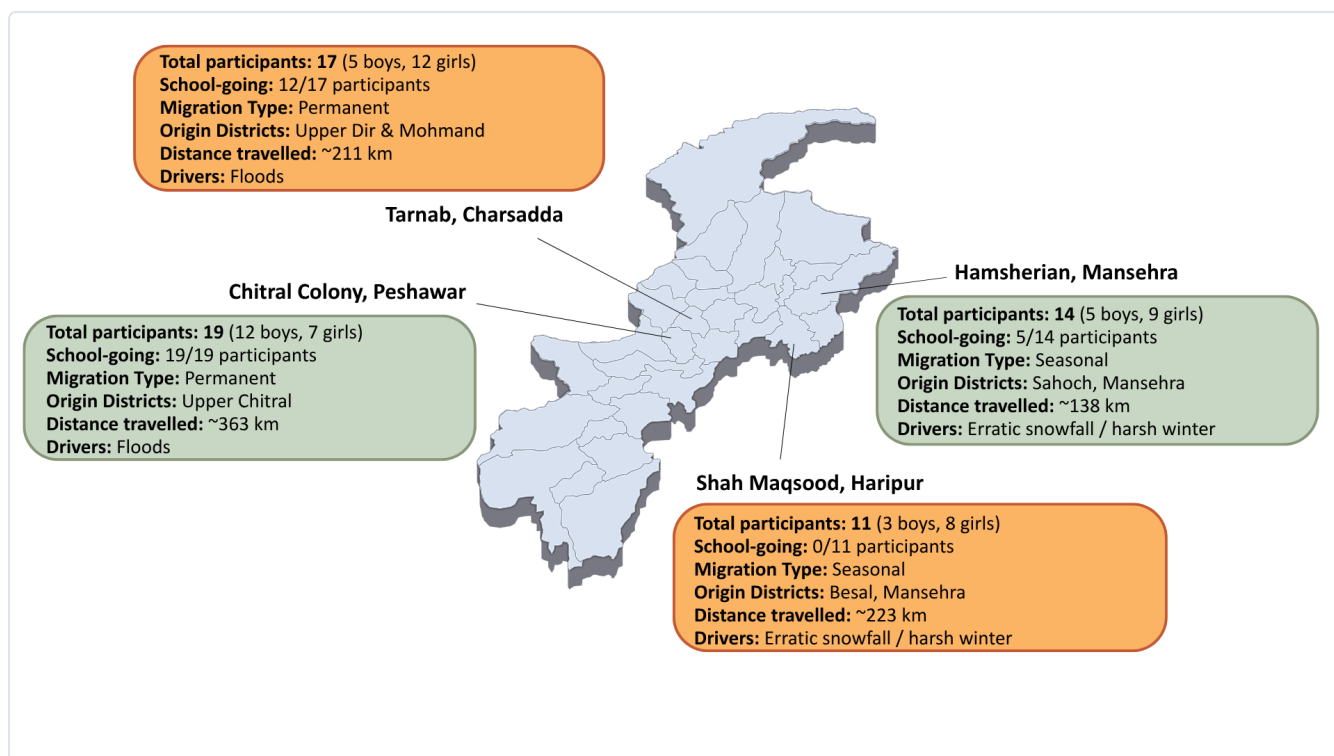


Figure 1

Research locations and participant profiles across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Key Findings

Access to Education

The most prominent access barriers differed across locations. In Chitral Colony, affordability of private education emerged as a key challenge despite improved physical access. In Tarnab and Hamsherian, distance to secondary schools, transport costs, and gender norms were the principal barriers. In Shah Maqsood, livelihood responsibilities and sociocultural norms largely prevented educational access despite the physical presence of schools.

Documentation and transfer requirements create barriers for both permanent and seasonal migrant learners, though more pronounced for seasonal migrants. Government schools deny enrolment to seasonal migrants in destination areas on the premise that a school leaving certificate cannot belong to two places. In Tarnab, one family reported that loss of school records and identity documents resulted in their child remaining out of school for nearly one and a half years.

Discrimination and gendered barriers drive school exclusion. Afghan-origin seasonal migrants in Haripur face school exclusion due to deportation fears and identity-based discrimination – all 11 participants in Haripur are out of school. In Hamsherian, Mansehra, girls face disproportionately high dropouts after primary school, linked to gender norms; one female CCM was unable to continue education after fifth grade because her family objected to male teachers at the secondary level.

Continuity of Education

School dropouts rise post-migration: 9/42 previously school-going participants dropped out after climate migration. No cases of dropout were reported in Chitral Colony, where strong parental support facilitated re-enrolment. In contrast, dropout was most evident in Hamsherian, where repeated seasonal migration and informal enrolment arrangements disrupted educational continuity, particularly for girls.

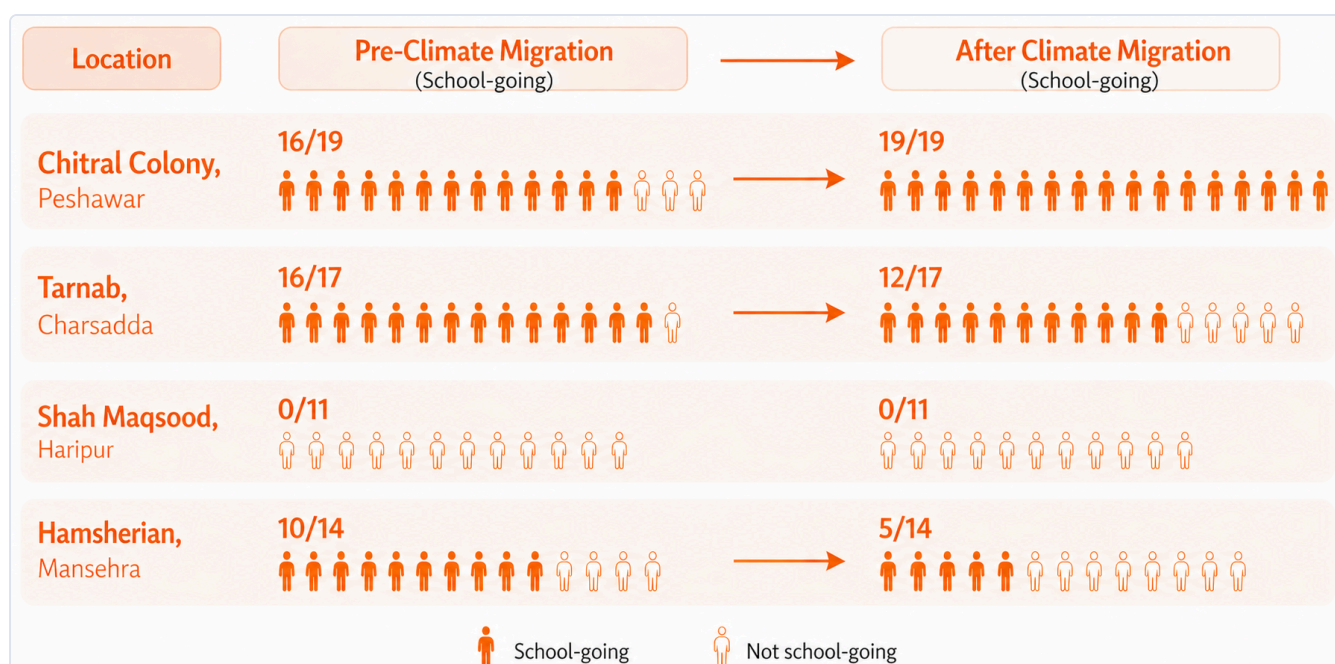


Figure 2

School-going status before and after climate migration, by location

Administrative barriers make readmission and transfer difficult. Government schools deny enrolment without permanent residency, making transfer difficult for seasonal migrants. Permanent migrants face grade misalignment in destination areas. **Repeated migration and language barriers** weaken learning continuity: some CCMs required five to six months to develop sufficient Pashto proficiency to understand lessons, while others continued to struggle even after several years of schooling.

Quality of Education

Teacher shortages and hostile classroom environments undermine learning. Some destination areas (e.g. Chitral Colony) offer improved teacher availability, but others encounter corporal punishment and non-academic tasks that discourage engagement. Government girls' primary school in Tarnab has one teacher for 160 students.

Overcrowded and under-resourced schools hinder learning: CCMs report poor infrastructure, including lack of desks, electricity, drinking water, and functional washrooms, with female students facing particular privacy and hygiene challenges. Class overcrowding in destination areas reaches up to 90 students, compared to 55 in origin.

Discrimination and "otherisation" contribute to psychosocial distress: discrimination based on migrant identity (labelling as 'Kaghani', 'Sahochi', or 'Chitrali') leads to distress, segregation, and ultimately disengagement from learning. However, supportive teachers and positive peer relationships encourage participation and improve confidence.

Resilience and Coping

Participants demonstrate strong desire to study despite significant challenges. In Tarnab, a 16-year-old returned to school after a three-year interruption and balanced schooling with hotel work on Sundays while aspiring to pursue higher education abroad. Community-led schools reportedly support CCMs by providing books or waiving fees – in Chitral Colony, a private school principal financed approximately Rs. 400,000 worth of books and supported 50–60 CCMs unable to pay fees.

System-level responses, such as a District Education Office notification in Mansehra allowing seasonal migrants to sit in classes, offer greater potential for sustainable and scalable responses if integrated into long-term education planning – but currently remain largely informal and untracked.

Policy Implications

KP needs mobility-responsive education governance. Existing policies and administrative procedures are designed with stable and geographically fixed student populations in mind, which systemically excludes CCMs. Climate migration should not only be seen as a humanitarian or disaster-management issue. It is instead a structural education governance challenge requiring long-term policy adaptation.

“*Climate migration should not only be seen as a humanitarian or disaster-management issue. It is a structural education governance challenge.*”

Education system's response must move beyond reconstruction.

Existing responses remain focused on infrastructural recovery or short-term interventions like temporary learning centres. Responses need to emphasise restoring educational trajectories of children whose learning is disrupted by climate events.

Access alone is insufficient. Educational exclusion among CCMs is shaped by migration's interaction with pre-existing inequalities linked to gender, poverty, language, and identity. Improving access alone may be insufficient without corresponding investments in retention, progression, learning quality, and psychosocial wellbeing.

Aligning education systems with policy and rights commitments.

Although the KP Education Sector Plan 2020/21–2024/25 emphasises equitable access, inclusion, and resilience, the experiences of CCMs demonstrate that current systems remain insufficiently responsive to migrant populations, carrying implications for Article 25A and Pakistan's SDG 4 commitments.

Recommendations

Successful implementation will require strong political will, legal revisions, and the deliberate allocation and reallocation of fiscal space within KP's Annual Development Programme.

Priority Area 1 · Short term (0–12 months) · No dependency

- **1.** DESE, with support from NADRA and DEOs, introduces flexible enrolment and re-entry rules for seasonal and permanent climate migrants.
- **2.** EMIS, with support from DESE and DEOs, establishes a portable student record system for climate-mobile children.
- **3.** ESEF, in collaboration with NADRA, provides targeted access support through mobile registration units.

Priority Area 2 · Medium term (1–3 years) · Depends on PA 1

- **4.** EMIS and PDMA mandate mapping of climate migrant settlements into district education planning, budgeting, and teacher allocation.
- **5.** ESEF expands Education Support Schemes and Girls Community Schools in priority areas.
- **6.** DCTE and DEOs strengthen quality through master trainer models and multilingual teacher training (e.g. Khowar to Pashto/Urdu).

Priority Area 3 · Long term (3–5 years) · Depends on PA 1 & 2

- **7.** Under the Chief Minister's Secretariat, align KPESED, PDMA, Social Welfare, and P&DD on interdepartmental coordination, with quarterly reviews.
- **8.** KPESED institutionalises continuous evidence generation on CCMs' education needs, particularly in other migrant-hosting areas.

Conclusion

Findings identify key gaps in education access, continuity, and quality in climate migration contexts in KP that have remained understudied. They underscore distinct educational impediments that climate migrants face – documentation, re-enrolment difficulties, language mismatches, etc. – which have remained unaddressed in existing policies.

This brief reveals transferable insights that policymakers can utilise for interventions in similar contexts and other known climate migrant settlements. Overall, integrating CCMs' specific needs into education planning can pave the way for increased educational resilience in KP, which can ensure education becomes truly available, accessible, acceptable, and of quality for present and future CCMs, in line with Pakistan's rights and policy commitments.

For More Information

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This policy brief is a summary of the findings and recommendations of the report titled: *Tracing Child Migrants' Education Access, Continuity, and Quality Amidst Climate-Induced Disruptions in Pakistan*.

More information about the DARE-RC Programme: <https://darerc.org/>

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