

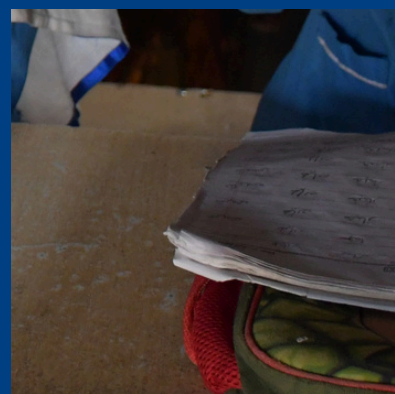
Tracing Child Migrants' Educational Trajectories Amidst Climate Disruptions in Sindh

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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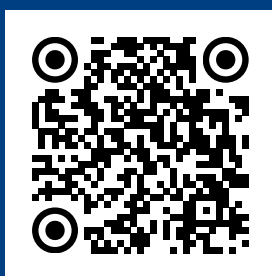
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Seher Aftab, Sevim Saadat and Ali Imtinan

Methodology

- **Design:** qualitative, participatory research combining human rights, intersectionality and educational resilience perspectives; climate migration from 2022 onwards, ages 5–19.
- **Methods:** 40 semi-structured interviews, 38 FGDs, 8 KIIs, and 20 stakeholder consultation participants across four Sindh locations, December 2025.

Key Figures

2.4M

climate migrants Karachi could receive by 2050

91,000

children estimated in Sindhbad's informal settlements

58/78

participants attending school before migration, dropping to 38 after

17/19

participants in New Sindhbad were out of school

3–4 km

distance many CCMs walk to reach the nearest school

4

research locations across Sindh

Findings

1

Access depends on where and how migrants settle

Those settling within existing, functioning communities tend to stay connected to education; isolated informal settlements are often completely cut off.

2

Distance, safety and documentation compound to exclude

Safety concerns, distance/transport barriers, documentation lost in disasters, and livelihood pressures prevent access to education.

3

Dropout rises sharply after migration

Driven cumulatively by distance, safety, documentation, and livelihood pressures; girls held back by mobility, boys by pressure to earn.

4

Rigid rules and language barriers disrupt learning

Transfer rules, grade repetition and language barriers for Sindhi-speaking migrants moving into Urdu/English-medium classrooms disrupt learning.

5

Isolated settlements and TLCs face severe conditions

Overcrowding, missing WASH facilities, and shortages of basic learning materials make learning difficult in temporary learning centres.

6

Children remain motivated, but support depends on goodwill

Self-study, exam preparation and community-led efforts persist, but fade if migration becomes prolonged.

Policy Implications

- Climate-induced migration is an education governance and long-term planning challenge, not a humanitarian or disaster-management concern alone.
- Educational exclusion is driven by overlapping disadvantages – poverty, gender, religion, language, documentation status, and settlement conditions.
- Education responses need to move beyond short-term recovery to support learning continuity across different migration pathways.
- Future education policies in Sindh should incorporate climate-induced migration with dedicated priorities, targets, and measures.

Recommendations

SHORT-TERM · 0–12 MONTHS

Remove the Basic Barriers

- Mandate provisional enrolment where documentation is missing.
- Integrate CCM data points into the Sindh EMIS (SEMIS).
- Notify schools to readmit CCMs, including mid-year.

MEDIUM-TERM · 1–3 YEARS

Build Flexible Pathways

- Introduce flexible and non-formal education pathways for working children.
- Establish community-based education governance in CCM-dense settlements.

LONG-TERM · 3–5 YEARS

Institutionalise & Fund

- Include CCMs as a vulnerable group in the Sindh Education Sector Plan.
- Establish provincial coordination mechanism linking SELD, SEF, PDMA and NADRA.
- Establish voucher/cash transfer systems prioritising girls and religious minorities.

Key Messages

With climate change displacing millions in Pakistan, Karachi alone can receive up to 2.4 million climate migrants by 2050, adding to settlements already crowded with migrants. Reliable data on how many of the displaced children remain out of school and what they need to stay in it is rare. This brief traces what happens to their education after migration, and what Sindh's system needs to respond.

Whether children can access school after migrating depends on where and how they settle: those settling within existing, functioning communities tend to stay connected to education, while those in isolated informal settlements are often completely cut off. Safety concerns, distance/transport barriers, documentation lost in disasters, and livelihood pressures prevent children's access to education.

Dropout rises sharply after migration, driven cumulatively by distance, safety, documentation, and livelihood pressures. Girls are held back by mobility and safety concerns, boys by the pressure to earn. Even where children do continue schooling, rigid transfer rules, grade repetition and language barriers common to Sindhi-speaking migrants moving into Urdu- or English-medium classrooms disrupt learning long after the initial disruption.

Where communities are more established, teacher availability and regularity improve but in isolated settlements, and in the temporary learning centres set up after disasters, severe overcrowding, missing WASH facilities, and shortages of even basic learning materials make learning difficult. Many children also carry deep psychosocial distress from the disruption itself, though supportive teachers and peers can meaningfully shift this.

Despite the barriers, children remain motivated to keep learning through self-study, independent exam preparation, and community-led efforts (e.g., a free tuition centre). But this support depends on individual initiative and local goodwill rather than a system families can rely on, and it fades if migration becomes prolonged.

Addressing these challenges starts with removing the barriers that keep migrant children out of school in the first place, such as allowing provisional enrolment where documentation is missing, mandating that schools readmit migrant children even mid-year, and building disaggregated data on climate migrant children into Sindh's existing education information system.



Introduction

According to the Climate Risk Index 2025, Pakistan ranked first amongst countries most affected by extreme weather events in 2022 (Germanwatch 2025). Pakistan also ranks highest in Asia on the Children's Climate Risk Index (UNICEF 2021). Recent climate-induced disruptive events displaced 8 million people in 2022 and virtually 3 million in 2025 in Pakistan, half of whom were children (IDMC 2023; UNOCHA 2025).

Sindh represents a particularly important context due to its increasing vulnerability to both rapid-onset and slow-onset climate events. Karachi increasingly functions as a destination for climate migrants, with settlements such as New Sindhabad, Gulshan-e-Syed Tent City, Musharraf Colony, Ibrahim Hyderi, and Rehri Goth hosting hundreds of thousands of climate migrants. Sindhabad and adjoining informal settlements house approximately 152,381 residents (2023 Census), including an estimated 91,000 children, virtually all of whom have little to no access to education post-migration. Projections suggest that Karachi could receive up to 2.4 million climate migrants by 2050.

This brief provides evidence to close the gap and strengthen existing frameworks to respond to CCM needs, drawing 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 CCMs, grounded in an integrated framework combining human rights, intersectionality, and educational resilience perspectives.

Scope: CCMs are defined as children who moved due to rapid-onset (floods) or slow-onset (erratic snowfall, droughts) climate events from 2022 onwards, aged 5–19.

Methods: A desk review; 40 participants engaged through Semi-Structured Interviews; 38 participants engaged through Focus Group Discussions; 8 Key Informant Interviews; and 20 participants engaged through multi-stakeholder consultations, including SELD, SEF, PDMA Sindh, UNICEF and IOM.

Data Collection: Fieldwork was conducted in December 2025 in four research locations in Sindh: New Sindhabad, Karachi; Gulshan-e-Syed Tent City, Karachi; Gharo, Thatta; and Jhuddo, Mirpur Khas.

2.4M

PROJECTED MIGRANTS BY
2050

Climate migrants Karachi could receive, creating significant infrastructure pressure

“**Reliable province-wide estimates of climate-induced child migrants remain unavailable – existing data is fragmented and location-specific.**”

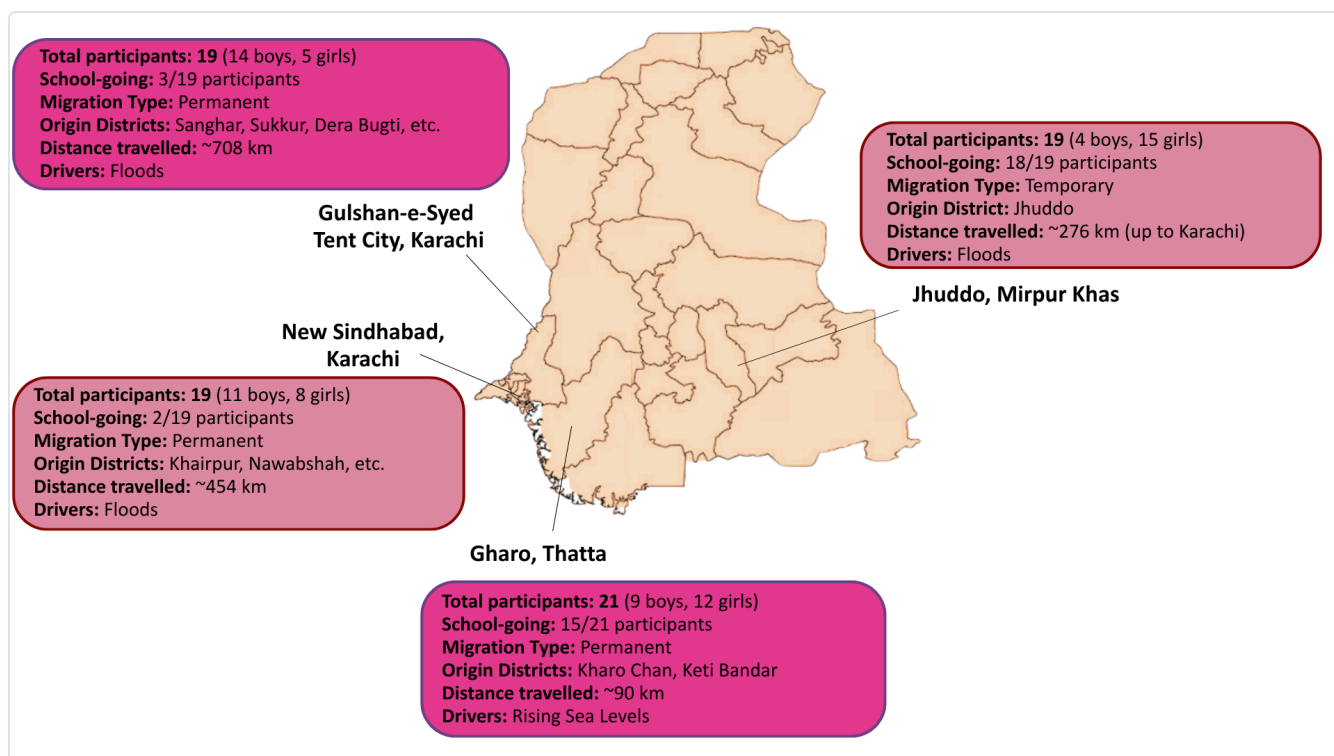


Figure 1

Research locations and participant profiles across Sindh

Key Findings

Access to Education

Access to education is not uniformly affected by migration; it depends on where and how migrants settle. In Karachi, remote and informal post-flood settlements such as New Sindhabad and Tent City remain disconnected from basic service provision. In Jhuddo, temporary migration disrupted access, with families moving repeatedly for periods lasting 2–6 months. In Gharo, migrant families settled within existing communities and had access to nearby government and SEF-supported schools, which helped many CCMs continue their education.

Within the study sample, 17 out of 19 participants in New Sindhabad and 16 out of 19 in Tent City were out of school. During temporary migration in Jhuddo, only 3 out of 19 participants were able to access education, primarily through Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs).

Distance made schools physically inaccessible: CCMs in New Sindhabad and Tent City often had to walk 3–4 kilometres each way. **Safety concerns** significantly restrict girls' access – parents described fears of kidnapping, harassment, and theft along routes to school. **Documentation requirements** exclude CCMs: families who lost B-forms and CNICs during the floods were often denied admission.

Continuity of Education

School dropout increases sharply after migration, especially in informal settlements. Before migration, 58 out of 78 study participants in Sindh were attending school. After migration, this dropped to 38. Girls were more likely to discontinue education due to mobility restrictions, while boys were more likely to leave school to support household recovery through labour.

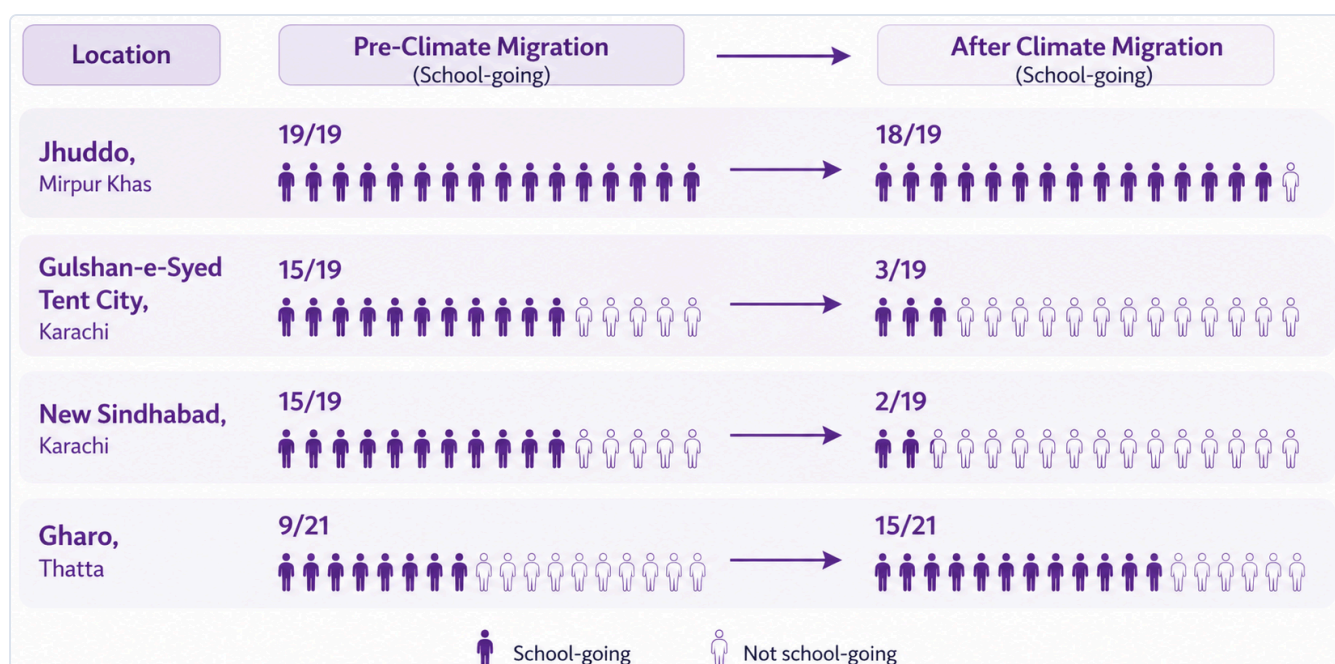


Figure 2

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

Migration can improve educational continuity when families settle in supportive environments – some CCMs in Gharo experienced improved continuity due to nearby government and SEF-supported schools and stronger social ties. **Repeating grades and language barriers** make adjustment difficult: many CCMs from Interior Sindh struggled to understand lessons taught mainly in Urdu and English after previously studying only in Sindhi. **Strict admission and transfer rules** disrupt progression: schools often refused mid-year admissions or required transfer certificates families could not obtain.

Quality of Education

Teacher availability improves for some CCMs after migration, but quality and regularity remain inconsistent. TLCs in Jhuddo often operated in overcrowded tents with up to 50–60 students in a single tent, with many CCMs sitting on floors or outside in extreme heat. **Limited learning materials** reduce participation: some parents in Tent City described teaching their children by drawing shapes in the dust. **Psychosocial distress** affects engagement – one CCM remarked, ‘In the village, I was a student; here I am nothing.’

Resilience and Coping Strategies

Many CCMs demonstrated strong motivation to continue learning despite prolonged disruption, relying on self-study or combining school with part-time work. Community-led initiatives, such as a free tuition centre established by a female CCM in New Sindhabad, reflected strong local commitment. Three years after migration, there was still no school within safe walking distance of New Sindhabad or Tent City, and those attempting to continue learning relied largely on personal initiative rather than institutionalised systems.

Policy Implications

Education systems need to respond to mobile populations. Sindh's education system is largely designed for stable and geographically fixed populations. Rigid admission procedures, documentation requirements, and limited re-enrolment support make it difficult for CCMs to return to school.

Education responses need to move beyond short-term recovery.

Current responses to climate shocks, including TLCs and emergency learning support, are often short-term and do not reach all CCMs. Responses need to support learning continuity and long-term educational resilience.

Educational exclusion is driven by overlapping disadvantages.

Exclusion is shaped not by migration alone, but by its interaction with poverty, gender, religion, language, documentation status, and settlement conditions.

Education planning should align with Pakistan's rights and policy commitments. The educational experiences of CCMs highlight gaps in fulfilling Article 25A, the UNCRC, and SDG 4 commitments.

“*Climate-induced migration is not a humanitarian or disaster-management concern, but an education governance and long-term planning challenge.*”

Recommendations

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

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

- **R.1** SELD and SEF mandate provisional enrolment (in the absence of complete documentation) for CCMs in government and SEF-assisted schools.
- **R.2** SELD integrates CCM data points into the Sindh EMIS (SEMIS) to monitor enrolment, attendance, retention and dropout.
- **R.3** SELD and SEF notify all schools to readmit (including mid-year) CCMs migrating permanently or returning after a disaster.

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

- **R.4** SELD and SEF introduce flexible and non-formal education pathways, including adjusted timings and accelerated re-entry frameworks.
- **R.5** SELD establishes community-based education governance in select CCM-dense settlements, including reactivated SMCs with CCM representation.

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

- **R.6** SELD explicitly includes CCMs as a vulnerable group in the upcoming Sindh Education Sector Plan, with distinct provisions by migration type.
- **R.7** The Sindh Chief Minister's Secretariat establishes a provincial coordination mechanism linking SELD, SEF, PDMA, NADRA, and SSPA.
- **R.8** SELD, SWD, and SSPA establish a school-based voucher system or conditional cash transfers, prioritising girls and religious minorities.

Conclusion

Findings identify key gaps in education access, continuity, and quality in climate migration contexts in Sindh that have remained understudied. They underscore distinct educational impediments that climate migrants face – distance, safety concerns, re-enrolment difficulties, and so forth – which have thus far remained unaddressed in existing policies.

This brief reveals transferable insights that policymakers can utilise for interventions in similar contexts. Overall, integrating CCMs' specific needs into education planning can pave the way for increased educational resilience in Sindh, ensuring education becomes truly available, accessible, acceptable, and of quality for present and future CCMs.

For More Information

Authors: Seher Aftab, Sevim Saadat and Ali Imtinan

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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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