**Plan International’s submission to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs: Against Women in Law and Practice: “Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change”**

**Plan International has developed this submission to inform the forthcoming report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs on “Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change”.**

Plan International is an independent non-governmental organisation and is in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC. Founded in 1937, Plan International is one of the oldest and largest children’s rights organisations in the world. We strive to advance children’s rights and equality for girls and young women in both development and humanitarian contexts. Working with children and young people in more than 75 countries around the world, we tackle the root causes of inequality faced by children, especially girls and young women.

**Addressing the other half: why age, gender, and diversity is essential in responding to the needs of Internally Displaced Persons**

Conflict, violence, disasters, climate change and other factors force millions of people to flee their homes each year, many times without the possibility of returning. According to IDMC’s 2020 Global Report, around 24.5 million people were internally displaced in 2019.[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, the effects of displacement disproportionally affect different groups, based on their age, gender, and diversity as well as on their location (rural and urban areas). Living on the intersection of age, gender, and diversity, girls and young women comprise a large part of internally displaced populations. Out of 41 million people worldwide living in internal displacement at the end of 2018 more than half were women and girls out of which 16.4 are between 5 and 25 years old.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Understanding the specific needs of displaced women and girls is important to determine effective responses and policies, but also to unlock women's and girl’s full potential for finding solutions.

**The gendered impacts of climate change and its disproportionate effects on internally displaced young women and girls**

Over the last decade, a growing body of studies has shown how climate has been increasingly affecting patterns of displacement. Changes in the physical climate and environment, such as droughts and desertification, undermines agricultural livelihoods and reduces food security, forcing people to move. [[3]](#footnote-3)

However, young women and girls, particularly the ones internally displaced, disproportionally feel the impacts of climate change. Over the last years, there has been growing consensus among the international community on the negative impacts of climate change in advancing gender equality. A variety of Human Rights Council[[4]](#footnote-4) and CSW[[5]](#footnote-5) resolutions recognize that climate change magnifies the inequalities women and girls suffer in accessing rights and poses a significant threat to the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Internally displaced girls and young women are often one of the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Entrenched social and gender norms, harmful practices, and stigma influencing their roles, capacities and coping strategies, behaviors, expectations, opportunities, access to basic needs and recourses, rights and justice, and mobility increases their vulnerability. At the same time, the experience of displacement expose them to new threats and jeopardize their access to rights and services.[[6]](#footnote-6) A report by IDMC, Plan International and IMPACT shows how internally displaced women and girls are at greater risks of missing out on education, less likely to access health and livelihood opportunities.

1. ***Impacts on the health of women and girls***

During extreme weather events, which are becoming more intense and frequent due to climate change, disruption to health services often leads to specific risks for women and girls. In IDP camps or within poorer communities in urban areas where IDPs are settled further damage in already fragile health systems can curb access to comprehensive, dignified SRHR including comprehensive sexuality education, access to and counseling on contraception, dignified care related to SGBV, prenatal and post-natal service, STI counseling and care.

Studies have shown that impacts of climate disasters in health systems further increases the chances of women and girls to unplanned pregnancies and sexual and reproductive health complications. Two surveys conducted in 2019 on a sample of 150 IDPs each – one involving people displaced by drought in Somalia, the other people displaced by violence in Ethiopia – show that more women than men felt their physical health had deteriorated since their displacement (see figure 4).[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. ***Impacts on girl’s education***

Climate change causes additional gender-based obstacles in accessing education and remaining in school because of deteriorating livelihoods and negative coping strategies. Girls’ lack of access to education – a denial of their rights – compounds their vulnerability as they have limited information about climate change, what to do in a disaster and access to information and timely and lifesaving early warnings.

Disruptions in education and/or overcrowding of schools facilities leads to enhanced protection risks for adolescent girls. Studies have shown that schools, particularly for vulnerable groups of children are a safe space, which reduces girls’ risk of violence. Further stretch caused by forced migration and its subsequent risks of internally displaced girls missing out on schools may lead to potential danger in exposing them to violence and extended drop out status.

**Increases in conflict due to climate-change put internally displaced girls and young women at a greater risk**

Studies show that climate change can increase the likelihood of violent conflict, insecurity and fragility through its impacts on resource availability and livelihood security. Community members often have little choice in making ends meet, turning to non-state armed groups for alternative livelihoods and income opportunities.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Climate change exacerbates existing risks for forcibly displaced women and girls in regions already facing fragility and instability. A recent report by Plan International in the Lake Chad region shows that forcibly displaced adolescent girls living in conflict areas face enhanced protection risks, in particular to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence [[9]](#footnote-9) that could be exacerbated by climate change as a key driver in the political instability in the region.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Several reports have also called attention to the effects of conflict in the region for adolescent girls’ education.[[11]](#footnote-11) Attacks on education have a devastating impact on all students and teachers, but they can have particularly debilitating long-term consequences for girls and women, including early pregnancy, the stigma associated with sexual violence and children born from rape, and lost education.[[12]](#footnote-12) Armed parties also commit sexual violence during attacks on schools or while students are fleeing an attack, as well as when girls are walking to and from school.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Participation and access to decision-making**

Even though climate change disproportionately affects internally displaced girls, they are often the least to have access to decision-making spaces. Research conducted in Lake Chad with adolescent girls has highlighted that the overwhelming majority have felt excluded from decisions taken both by humanitarian actors and the government.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Girls’ participation in decision-making is increasingly recognized as fundamental to age- and gender-sensitive policymaking to better address girls’ needs and well-being.[[15]](#footnote-15) [[16]](#footnote-16) As observed by Plan International’s children-centered climate change adaptation (4CA) programme, girls, in particular, have an important role to play in reducing risk and, when adequately supported and empowered, can effectively communicate risk and drive change in their communities.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**COVID-19 is worsening the effects of climate-induced internal displacement and represents an additional barrier in providing services for IDPs.**

COVID-19 is also expected to have an indirect but serious impact on climate-change-induced displacement, particularly on the current food security situation, which may further increase internal displacement. In interviews with Plan International’s country office in Ethiopia COVID-19, prevention measures were cited as contributing to delays in the movement of commercial goods throughout the country, resulting in pockets of food insecurity. The pandemic also negatively affected supply chains including food supplies to markets in areas where cash transfers are implemented, likely to lead to increased food insecurity.

Within IDP camps, the outbreak is having a negative impact on food, cash, and in-kind but IDP adolescent girls may be at particular risk. In Ethiopia it was reported increase in cases of gender-based violence as a result of reduced family and community care protection and a breakdown of social protection structures. School closures and reduced family livelihoods increase the risk of children dropping out of school and turning to negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, child labour, or sex work. Other impacts include restricted access to adequate food because of a breakdown in the food supply chain and household mitigation measures; reduced access to services, in particular for already vulnerable children such as children living on the street, unaccompanied and separated children, child-headed households, and children with disabilities.

**Case study: tackling the effects of climate displacement through gender and age-sensitive interventions in Ethiopia**

At the peak of the displacement crisis in Ethiopia between January and April 2019, conflict and climate shocks left some 3.2 million people displaced with the majority of people in need of relief assistance in 2020 remaining the ones impacted by climate shocks.

The crisis disproportionately affected women and girls on internal displacement due to the unequal distribution of socio-economic burdens based on gender. In displacement areas, women and children who form the majority of IDPs, face serious protection concerns, including gender-based violence, rape and sexual violence, and child marriage. Inadequate shelter and lack of gender-segregated WASH facilities expose these groups to many of these risks. The lack of security and limited access to basic services have stretched the coping mechanisms of affected populations and increased their vulnerability.

Plan International Ethiopia has been working in West Guji and Gedeo for the drought emergency response since 2015 where it has been leading the implementation of integrated nutrition, child protection, WASH and livelihoods response in IDP camps. Specific activities include provision of supplementary food for moderately and severely malnourished children, construction of latrines, distribution of dignity kits, hygiene and sanitation promotion, provision of psychosocial services for children and training of local safeguarding committees.

**Recommendations**

* States should explicitly identify and implement actions to address the disproportionate impacts on internally displaced girls, addressing the gender, age and disability impacts of climate change in national climate strategies (including National Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans). Those strategies should address efficiently the economic, cultural and social impacts and challenges that climate change represents, particularly to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls both in rural and urban areas to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change. This includes the provision of access to jobs and other economic opportunities for young women and strengthening their capacity to anticipate, respond to and recover from climate stressors.
* States should ensure that Sexual and Reproductive Health Services are available for displaced adolescent girls and young women. This means to ensure access to child- and youth- friendly comprehensive, dignified SRHR, including access to and counseling on contraception, dignified care related to SGBV, prenatal and post-natal service, challenges in accessing MHM should also be discussed. Completing a quality education and having the ability to freely decide and control over one’s sexual and reproductive life empowers girls to contribute to more resilient and adaptable societies and greener economies.
* States should address gender-specific barriers to participation in climate action and policy processes, creating enabling environments that facilitate the meaningful participation of girls throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This includes the provision of adequate resources towards achieving the full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels on environmental issues.
* There is an urgent need to address displacement associated with drought in a way that goes beyond humanitarian aid. All actors should work to strengthen institutional and local capacities including through grass-roots groups and committees of IDPs, with the participation of young women and girls.
* States should provide age and disability accessible climate and disaster information and policy frameworks. Information should promote human rights and gender equality and challenge entrenched gender norms that affect girls’ rights and resilience.
1. IDMC, ‘2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement’ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. IDMC, Plan International and IMPACT, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight: Women and Girls in Internal Displacement’, 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Brookings Institute, ‘Climate Change and Internal Displacement’, October 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/38/4 on ‘Human rights and climate change’ (2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. CSW Agreed Conclusions, Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (2016), para. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. IDMC, Plan International and IMPACT, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight: Women and Girls in Internal Displacement’, 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. IDMC, Measuring the costs of internal displacement on IDPs and hosts: case studies in Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, January 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Brookings Institute, ‘Climate Change and Internal Displacement’, October 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Plan International, ‘Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Lake Chad’, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. J. Schaar (2017), The relationship between climate change and violent conflict, Sida 23 WHO, Climate change and human health https://www.who.int/globalchange/globalcampaign/cop21/en/

https://www.who.int/globalchange/globalcampaign/cop21/en/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. GCPEA, ‘It’s very painful to talk about’ : the impacts of attacks on education on women and girls’, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Plan International, ‘Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Lake Chad’, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. General Assembly Resolution A/RES/73/146 on ‘Trafficking in Women and Girls’, para 58 (2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. CRC, articles 12 and 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Plan International 4CA programme - <https://planinternational.org/publications/act-adapt-child-centredclimate-change-adaptation> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)