# THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GERMANY AND THE NETHERLANDS

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DOI: 10.13165/MMS-25-03-01-06

**Abstract**. Climate change-induced displacement is an escalating crisis, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations such as children and youth. This study examines the mental health impacts of such displacement in Germany and the Netherlands, with a focus on the role of legal frameworks, housing conditions and mental health services in shaping resilience and adaptation. Using a comparative analysis and policy review methodology, the research evaluates Germany's trauma-focused mental health interventions against the Netherlands' resilience-building strategies. The findings indicate that Germany's approach effectively addresses immediate psychological distress through trauma-informed care but struggles with sustaining long-term resilience. In contrast, the Netherlands prioritises preventive strategies that foster enduring psychological well-being but may fall short in providing urgent trauma support. The study highlights the need for an integrated mental health framework that combines immediate trauma care with long-term resilience-building measures. To enhance support for displaced youth, this research recommends strengthening cross-border collaborations, integrating mental health services into disaster response efforts, and improving data collection to inform evidence-based policies.

**Keywords:** climate change, displacements, mental health, interventions, trauma.

## Introduction

Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it is a present reality, causing increasingly frequent and severe extreme weather events that can lead to displacement[1]. Children and youth are particularly vulnerable to the mental health consequences of climate change-induced displacement, experiencing a range of psychological distress, from eco-anxiety to post-traumatic stress[2].

The connection between climate change and displacement has drawn increasing global attention as environmental crises become more frequent and severe. While climate change is often a major factor behind forced migration, displacement is rarely driven by environmental factors alone. Instead, it results from a complex mix of environmental, economic and social pressures[3].

In 2022, an estimated 32 million people were displaced due to extreme weather events, and forecasts suggest that by 2050, as many as 140 million individuals could be forced to migrate due to climate-related changes[4]. Among those affected, children and young people are particularly vulnerable. Displacement disrupts education, family stability and social connections, exposing youth to emotional distress, uncertainty, and adaptation challenges. These struggles can have a lasting impact on mental health, often leading to anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) long after relocation.

In Europe, the effects of climate-induced displacement are already visible. The Rhine–Meuse floods of 2021 affected Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands,

1 Jennifer L. Barkin, et al., "Effects of Extreme Weather Events on Child Mood and Behavior", *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology* 63 (11) (2021): 1301–1310. https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.14856.

2 Maya K. Gislason, Angel Kennedy, and Stephanie Witham, "The Interplay between Social and Ecological Determinants of Mental Health for Children and Youth in the Climate Crisis", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 19 (2021): 10308. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094573.

3 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Report,* (2023). https://www.unhcr.org/global-compact-refugees-indicator-report.

4 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023* (Geneva: IDMC, 2023). https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023.

causing more than 240 deaths and damage costing millions of euro to repair[5]. The long-term consequences of such disasters are particularly severe for vulnerable groups, including children and adolescents, many of whom experience ongoing psychological distress, economic struggles ands social instability[6].

Climate change-induced displacement represents an immediate humanitarian challenge with considerable psychological repercussions, particularly impacting vulnerable groups such as children and youth. This analysis aimed to evaluate the psychological impacts of climate-driven displacement on young populations in Germany and the Netherlands.

Specific objectives included:

1. identifying key mental health challenges facing displaced children and youth
2. comparing mental health policies and interventions between these nations
3. highlighting gaps and areas for improvement in national mental health interventions
4. proposing targeted recommendations to enhance support systems

The research was specifically concerned with children and youth displaced due to climate-induced environmental events and their associated mental health outcomes. The research employed comparative analysis, a literature review of policy documents and an analysis of secondary data sources from international organisations.

5 European Environment Agency (EEA), *Europe's Changing Climate Hazards: An Indicator-Based Assessment. EEA Report No 24/2022*, (Copenhagen: EEA, 2022). https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/europes-changing-climate-hazards-1.

6 Frank Lehmkuhl, et al., "Assessment of the 2021 Summer Flood in Central Europe", *Environmental Sciences Europe* 34 (107) (2022). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-022-00685-1.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1. Climate Change and Displacement in Europe

In recent decades, climate change has become one of the major drivers of human displacement. Across Europe, extreme weather events, rising sea levels and shifting environmental conditions are increasingly forcing people to leave their homes. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change[7], Northern and Western Europe are particularly vulnerable, with floods, heatwaves and storms becoming more frequent and severe. Even highly developed nations such as Germany and the Netherlands, both known for their advanced flood management systems, are facing growing challenges in addressing climate-related displacement[8].

### 1.2. Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change-Induced Displacement on Children and Youth

Displacement due to climate change can have long-lasting effects on the mental health of children and youth[9]. These effects can be categorised as direct and indirect. Direct impacts include the trauma of experiencing extreme weather events, the loss of homes and possessions and the disruption of social networks[10]. Indirect impacts include increased stress and anxiety about the future, feelings of loss and grief related to environmental degradation (ecological grief), and the disruption of cultural identity and connection to place[11].

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7 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896.

8 Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI), *KNMI'20 Climate Scenarios for the Netherlands: A Guide for Professionals in Climate Adaptation* (De Bilt, Netherlands: KNMI, 2020). https://www.knmi.nl/kennis-en-datacentrum/publicatie/knmi20-climate-scenarios.

9 Gislason, Kennedy, and Witham, *supra note*, 2: 10308.

10 Barkin, *supra note*, 1: 1301–1310.

11 Paolo Cianconi, Sophia Betr, and Luigi Janiri, "The Impact of Climate Change on Mental Health: A Systematic Descriptive Review", *Frontiers in P*sychiatry 11 (2020). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2020.00074.

**Direct Impacts**

Exposure to extreme weather events can be a traumatic experience for children, leading to post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression and anxiety. The loss of homes and possessions can also lead to feelings of grief, anger and hopelessness[12]. Displacement often disrupts social networks, separating children from friends, family, and community support systems, which are vital for their mental well-being[13]. The disruption of education and routines further compounds these challenges.

**Indirect Impacts**

Even without direct exposure to displacement, children and youth are increasingly aware of the negative effects of climate change, leading to eco-anxiety. This anxiety is characterised by feelings of worry, guilt and hopelessness about the future of the planet[14]. Children may also experience solastalgia, a feeling of distress caused by environmental change in their home environment[15]. The loss of connection to place and cultural identity can be particularly acute for Indigenous children and youth[16].

While forced displacement is often necessary for survival, it carries significant emotional and psychological consequences, particularly for children and youth. Young people forced to migrate due to climate disasters frequently experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression and PTSD, with effects that can persist

12 Terra Léger-Goodes, et al., "Eco-Anxiety in Children: A Scoping Review of the Mental Health Impacts of the Awareness of Climate Change", *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.872544.

13 James B. Kirkbride, et al., "The Social Determinants of Mental Health and Disorder: Evidence, Prevention and Recommendations", *World Psychiatry* 23, no. 1 (2024): 8–25. https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.21160.

14 Léger-Goodes, *op. cit.,* 12.

15 Cianconi, Betr and Janiri, *supra note*, 11.

16 Alexandra C. De Young, Susannah Keleher, Amanda Baldwin, and Justin A. Kenardy, "Preventive Early Intervention for Children and Adolescents Exposed to Trauma", In *Evidence-Based Treatments for Trauma-Related Disorders in Children and Adolescents*, edited by Justin A. Kenardy (Cham: Springer, 2025), 159–188. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-77215-3_6.

for years[17]. Research has shown that individuals who suffer property losses due to natural disasters remain at an increased risk of psychological distress long after the initial event[18].

The 2021 floods in Germany serve as a recent example of these mental health challenges. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the ongoing threat of rising sea levels continues to create uncertainty and anxiety, particularly among younger generations[19].

The urgency of the need for intervention is underscored by historical flood patterns in Europe. Between 1960 and 2010, river flood hazards in Western and Central Europe increased by approximately 11% per decade, while Eastern and Southern Europe saw a decline of around 23%[20]. Extreme rainfall-driven flash floods are more common in Southern Europe; however, the psychological impact of climate-induced displacement remains under-researched, particularly when it comes to youth populations[21].

For children and adolescents, displacement disrupts critical aspects of development, including education, friendships and family support systems. Uncertainty and instability greatly increase their vulnerability to mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. According to a UNICEF study, children displaced due to climate disasters are substantially more likely than other children to develop PTSD and experience emotional distress.

Additionally, a multinational study that surveyed 10,000 young people found

17 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Report*, (2023). https://www.unhcr.org/global-compact-refugees-indicator-report.

18 Barkin, Barkin, *supra note*, 1: 785–790.

19 Philipp Hammingh, Berend Daniels, Peter Koutstaal, and Menno Menkveld, "Netherlands Climate and Energy Outlook 2021", *PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency*, 2021. https://www.pbl.nl/en/publications/climate-and-energy-outlook-2021.

20 Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI), *KNMI Strategy 2015-2020*, KNMI, 2015.

21 UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, *Mental Health in Displaced Child and Youth Populations: A Review of the Evidence and Conceptual Frameworks* (Florence: UNICEF, 2023). https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3741/file/UNICEF-Mental-Health-Displacement-2.

that more than 80% expressed deep concern about climate change, with many reporting feelings of fear, grief and anger. Social media plays a crucial role in shaping young people's perceptions of climate change, often amplifying their anxiety[22].

The psychological impact of displacement does not occur in isolation but instead unfolds over multiple phases[23]. The risk of developing mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, is particularly high among displaced children. Studies suggest that young girls face additional vulnerabilities due to gender-specific stressors[24]. Furthermore, cultural stigma surrounding mental health in many communities prevents individuals from seeking professional help, often resulting in untreated conditions that manifest as physical symptoms rather than diagnosed psychological disorders[25].

Another major challenge for displaced youth is social integration. Many encounter discrimination, cultural disconnection and difficulties maintaining their sense of identity. The absence of strong support networks, combined with financial insecurity and fears of deportation, heightens the risk of alienation and makes mental health recovery even more challenging[26].

### 1.3. Contextual Variables Affecting Mental Health Outcomes

The mental health impact of climate change-induced displacement varies widely depending on several factors, including the length of displacement, the sociopolitical context of the host country and the availability of mental health

22 Marissa F. Parnes, et al., "Child and Adolescent Engagement with Climate Change on Social Media and Impacts on Mental Health: A Narrative Review", *Current Pediatric Reports* 12 (2024): 158–167. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40124-024-00331-9.

23 World Health Organization, "Mental Health and Forced Displacement", August 31, 2021. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement.

24 Cindy Finnigan, et al., "Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services by Migrant Youth", *Community Mental Health Journal* 58 (2022): 1101–1111. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-021-00919-1.

25 World Health Organization, "Refugee and Migrant Mental Health", Last modified August 31, 2021. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-mental-health.

26 Navjot S. Singh, et al., "Adolescent Well-Being in Humanitarian and Fragile Settings: Moving Beyond Rhetoric", *BMJ* 380 (2023): e068280. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2021-068280.

services. Children and youth who experience prolonged instability, such as living in temporary shelters or frequently moving between locations, are at much higher risk of developing psychological distress. The lack of a stable and supportive environment exacerbates emotional distress, leading to higher incidences of anxiety, depression and PTSD. Conversely, children who are resettled in structured environments with access to education, healthcare and social services benefit from protective factors that reduce the adverse effects of displacement[27].

The mental health of displaced children is also influenced by stressors encountered at different stages of migration:

- **Pre-migration stressors:** Many displaced children endure severe hardships before leaving their homes, including exposure to environmental degradation, extreme weather events, and loss of livelihoods due to climate change. These factors contribute to heightened stress and emotional vulnerability. Constant exposure to the threat of displacement affects cognitive and emotional development, making it difficult for children to establish a sense of safety and trust. Adolescents, in particular, struggle with developmental challenges when their access to education and social opportunities is restricted, further limiting their ability to form stable identities and relationships[28]. The loss of caregivers, community structures, and cultural disconnection exacerbates feelings of grief and loneliness, further increasing vulnerability to mental health disorders.
- **Migration travel and transit:** The journey itself can be traumatic, as displaced children may face unsafe conditions, lack of access to basic necessities, and, in some cases, legal obstacles. Many children endure physical exhaustion, hunger and dehydration, all of which further weaken their

27 Kirsten Bernhardt, et al., "Young Children's Development After Forced Displacement: A Systematic Review", *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* 18 (20) (2024). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-024-00711-5.

28 "Refugee and Migrant Mental Health", *supra note*, 25.

mental resilience. These experiences intensify psychological distress and contribute to feelings of fear and insecurity. The risk of exploitation, trafficking and abuse during migration further compounds trauma, with long-term consequences on emotional well-being. Moreover, the uncertainty and unpredictability of the migration journey increase children's feelings of helplessness, making them more susceptible to anxiety and depression[29].

- **Post-migration challenges:** Even after reaching a host country, displaced youth often struggle to access essential services, including mental health support. In Germany, the integration process is often lengthy, with asylum seekers facing bureaucratic delays before gaining full access to healthcare and education. In contrast, the Netherlands has a more streamlined process but still faces challenges in providing adequate mental health resources, especially for young migrants. Poor housing conditions, social isolation and legal uncertainty further increase anxiety and depression, making long-term adaptation difficult[29]. Discrimination and xenophobia in host communities also contribute to a sense of exclusion and low self-esteem. Limited access to education and employment opportunities reduces children's ability to integrate successfully, leading to a cycle of poverty and social marginalisation. Without adequate psychological support, displaced children may experience long-term emotional distress, impeding their capacity to build stable and fulfilling lives in their new environment.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopted a comparative analysis framework, drawing from policy reviews, statistical data and academic literature to assess the effectiveness of trauma-focused and resilience-based mental health strategies. To ensure a

29 Cindy Finniga, et al., "Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services by Migrant Youth", *Community Mental Health Journal* 58 (2022): 1101–1111. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-021-00919-1.

well-rounded evaluation, the research incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data sources.

***The study relied on a combination of primary and secondary sources:***

- Primary sources: government reports from the German Federal Ministry for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), the Dutch Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), and relevant climate adaptation policies.
- Secondary sources: peer-reviewed journal articles from publications such as *The Journal of Climate and Disaster Management*, *European Journal of Social Work*, and *The Lancet Psychiatry*.
- Comparative framework: the research employed a structured comparison of trauma-focused interventions (Germany) and resilience-based strategies (the Netherlands). Key mental health indicators included PTSD prevalence, anxiety rates and depression symptoms among displaced youth.
- Data collection and analysis: statistical analyses were performed using data from UNHCR, WHO and UNICEF reports, to compare mental health outcomes in displaced populations across both countries.

## 3. Comparative Analysis: Germany vs. the Netherlands

### 3.1. Germany: Climate Change and Mental Health Impacts

Germany has seen an increase in extreme weather events, particularly flooding, which has displaced thousands of people in recent years. The devastating 2021 floods forced widespread relocation, with research indicating that 28.2% of affected individuals exhibited symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) one year after the event[30]. In addition to the immediate trauma of losing their homes, these children faced disrupted schooling and family separations,

30 Marie-Luise Zenker, Philip Bubeck, and Annegret H. Thieken, "Always on My Mind: Indications of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Among Those Affected by the 2021 Flood Event in the Ahr Valley, Germany", *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 24 (2024): 2837–2856. https://doi.org/10.5194/nhess-24-2837-2024.

factors that greatly increased their risk of anxiety and depression.

Germany's mental health response has prioritised trauma-informed care, recognising that sudden displacement often leads to acute psychological distress. Research suggests that children who receive early psychological intervention recover more effectively than those who lack access to such support[31]. This highlights the importance of immediate trauma care in mitigating long-term mental health consequences.

### 3.2. The Netherlands: Climate Change and Mental Health Impacts

Unlike Germany, the Netherlands has taken a proactive approach to climate adaptation by investing heavily in flood prevention infrastructure. As a result, the country experiences far fewer cases of displacement due to climate-related disasters. However, this does not mean young people in the Netherlands are unaffected by climate-related stress. Studies show that climate anxiety is widespread among Dutch youth, with 67% reporting fears of future displacement due to rising sea levels[32].

When displacement does occur, the Netherlands emphasises long-term resilience-building rather than immediate trauma intervention. Community-based mental health initiatives integrate displaced children into social support networks, focusing on peer relationships, school-based programmes and gradual adaptation strategies[33]. While these efforts have proven effective for long-term mental well-being, critics argue that the lack of immediate trauma counselling may leave some displaced youth vulnerable to undiagnosed PTSD and chronic

31 De Young, Keleher, Baldwin, and Kenardy, *supra note*, 16.

32 Philipp Hammingh, Berend Daniels, Peter Koutstaal, and Menno Menkveld, "Netherlands Climate and Energy Outlook", *PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency*, 2021. https://www.pbl.nl/en/publications/climate-and-energy-outlook-2021.

33 World Health Organization, "The Netherlands Continues Their Leadership Role in Supporting the Mental Health of People Affected by Humanitarian Crises", July 3, 2023. https://www.who.int/news/item/03-07-2023-the-netherlands-continues-their-leadership-role-in-supporting-the-mental-health-of-people-affected-by-humanitarian-crises.

anxiety[34].

### 3.3. Climate Displacements and Mental Health Challenges

Germany has become a major destination for climate-displaced individuals, with thousands of people affected, many of them children and youth[35]. In 2022, a total of 2.7 million people migrated to Germany, marking the highest level of net migration since records began. In response, the country has implemented various support initiatives, including integration programmes and partnerships with non-governmental organisations[36]. Specific youth-focused mental health services aim to address the psychological challenges faced by young migrants[37]. However, despite various efforts, displaced children in Germany are at higher risk of experiencing anxiety and depression due to factors associated with forced migration, such as exposure to trauma and uncertainty regarding their future[38]. Community-driven initiatives that offer social connections and educational opportunities have been shown to promote stability and foster a sense of belonging, which can enhance the well-being of displaced children[39].

The Netherlands, in contrast, has fewer cases of climate-related migration due to its strong flood prevention measures[40]. Nonetheless, addressing the mental health needs of displaced youth remains a challenge. While community-based

34 University of South Wales, "Trauma and Mental Health in Forcibly Displaced Populations: Briefing Paper", July 2023. https://www.southwales.ac.uk/media/university-of-south-wales/site-assets/documents/news-/2023/07-july/Displaced-Populations-Briefing-Paper_Final.pdf.

35 Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), "Migration and Climate Change", Last modified 2021. https://www.bmz.de/en/issues/climate-change-and-development/migration-and-climate.

36 Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Destatis), "Migration Report 2022", 2023. https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration/_node.html.

37 De Young, Keleher, Baldwin, and Kenardy, *supra note*, 16.

38 UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, *Mental Health in Displaced Child and Youth Populations: A Review of the Evidence and Conceptual Frameworks*, (Florence: UNICEF, 2023). https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3741/file/UNICEF-Mental-Health-Displacement-2023.pdf.

39 UNHCR, "Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Persons of Concern: Community-Based Approaches", 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support.html.

40 Hammingh, Daniels, Koutstaal, and Menkveld., *supra note*, 19.

programmes and early interventions exist, the country lacks Germany's specialised infrastructure, which includes publicly funded inpatient services and trauma-informed psychiatric care tailored to children and adolescents.[41]. Another major barrier in the Netherlands is the limited availability of data regarding the mental health outcomes of displaced youth, which makes it difficult to design targeted interventions[42]. Despite these challenges, local collaborations and resilience-building workshops have helped many young people develop coping mechanisms and build social support networks[43].

### 3.4. Comparative Mental Health Indicators

Anxiety and depression are common among displaced youth in both Germany and the Netherlands. In Germany, approximately 48.1% of unaccompanied young refugees (UYRs) experience clinically relevant symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety[44]. A study conducted in the Ahr Valley region following the 2021 floods found that 28.2% of respondents exhibited signs of PTSD[45]. In the Netherlands, resilience programmes have been implemented to enhance coping skills and social connections, contributing to improved community recovery[46]. Furthermore, in 2021, 18% of young people aged 12 to 24 years in the Netherlands reported mental health issues, an increase from 11% in previous

41 Zenker, Bubeck, and Thieken, *supra note,* 30: 2837–2856.

42 Ceren Alozkan Sever, et al., "Addressing Challenges Faced by Young Refugees in the Netherlands: Adapting Problem Management Plus (PM+) with an Emotional Processing Module", *Cambridge Prisms: Global Mental Health* 11 (2024): e80. https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2024.93.

43 De Young, Keleher, Baldwin, and Kenardy, *supra note*, 16.

44 Fabienne Hornfeck, et. al., "Trajectories of mental health problems in unaccompanied young refugees in Germany and the impact of post-migration factors - a longitudinal study", *Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 34(3) (2025). https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39085492/.

45 F. Sisenop, and J. Lindert, "Depression, Posttraumatic Stress of Migrants and Refugees in Germany – A Cross-Sectional Study", *European Journal of Public Health* 34, Supplement 3 (November 2024): ckae144.801. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckae144.801.

46 Lena Walther, et al., "Psychological Distress Among Refugees in Germany: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Individual and Contextual Risk Factors and Potential Consequences for Integration Using a Nationally Representative Survey", *BMJ Open* 10 (8) (2020): e033658. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-033658.

years, with girls and young adults being particularly affected[47].

**Table 1.** Indicator Comparison

| Category | Germany | Netherlands |
|---|---|---|
| Prevalence of depression | In 2023, there were 409,000 cases of depression among individuals aged 5–24 years, reflecting an almost 30% increase compared with 2018[48]. | A 2024 report revealed that 53.1% of young adults aged 18–24 years experienced feelings of anxiety or depression; this was an increase from 41% in 2014[49]. |
| Anxiety about the climate | 26% of young Germans aged 18–29 years experience a high level of anxiety about the climate (scoring 2.4/7), while 65% report negative emotions related to climate change[50]. | 20% of young Dutch people (aged 16–30 years) experienced considerable stress about climate change, while 75% of Dutch individuals expressed anxiety about the impacts of climate change[51]. |
| Prevalence of PTSD in young people | 5–6% of PTSD cases in children and adolescents are linked to extreme weather events caused by climate change[52]. | PTSD and distress about the climate are seen among Dutch youth, but specific PTSD prevalence data are not well defined[53]. |
| Early access to trauma counselling | High level of access, as there is a federally funded crisis response. | Moderate access to trauma counselling, and it varies by municipality. |
| Policy focus | Immediate trauma relief and crisis counselling. | Long-term resilience and community-based support. |
| Strengths | Rapid mental health intervention. | Strong preventive mental health programmes. |
| **Weaknesses** | Long waiting times for therapy. | Limited trauma-specific interventions. |

Source: Compiled by the author, based on data from various sources.

47 Statistics Netherlands (CBS), "Mental Health Has Worsened among Young People", *CBS News*, June 2, 2022. https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2022/22/mental-health-has-worsened-among-young-people.

48 "9.5 Million Germans Affected by Depression", *Bild.de*. Last modified May 23, 2023. https://www.bild.de/leben-wissen/depression-9-5-mio-deutsche-von-psychischer-erkrankung-betroffen-6703d795cae472004103d30f.

49 Statistics Netherlands (CBS), "4 op de 10 Nederlanders Hebben Angst- of Depressiegevoelens", *CBS News*, September 10, 2024. https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2024/37/4-op-de-10-nederlanders-hebben-angst-of-depressiegevoelens.

50 André Hajek, and Hans-Helmut König, "The Association between Climate Anxiety and Mental Health: Results from a Nationally Representative Survey in Germany", *Environmental Research* 214 (Part 3) (2022): 114071. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2022.114071.

51 "Young Generation Experience Stress Due to Climate Crisis: Survey", *NL Times*, September 26, 2023. https://nltimes.nl/2023/09/26/young-generation-experience-stress-climate.

52 André Hajek, and Hans-Helmut König, "Climate Anxiety in Germany", *Public Health* 212 (2022): 89–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2022.09.007.

53 "Half of PTSD Cases Linked to the Pandemic, Climate Change a Factor", RIVM Netherlands, Last modified 2022. https://www.rivm.nl/en/news/half-of-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-related-to-pandemic.

Forced migration exposes children to adverse childhood experiences, such as violence, family separation and prolonged instability, which increase their vulnerability to mental health disorders[54]. In Germany, trauma-focused interventions have been established to support displaced youth, providing early access to trauma counselling and mental health care. In the Netherlands, while there are efforts to support displaced youth, data limitations hinder more targeted interventions for their mental health needs[55]. However, local collaborations and resilience-building workshops are being implemented to enhance emotional coping skills and foster social connections among displaced youth[56].

### 3.5. Government and Institutional Responses

Germany and the Netherlands have developed distinct approaches to addressing the mental health needs of displaced youth. Germany's system is centralised, prioritising trauma-focused interventions with federal financial support for mental health services following disasters. This includes crisis counselling and therapy, with special attention paid to vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors and refugees[57].

In contrast, the Netherlands operates under a decentralised model, where municipalities are responsible for delivering mental health services tailored to local needs. This approach emphasises early intervention and resilience-building programmes. Despite initiatives such as the STORM (Strong Teens and Resilient Minds) programme, which offers mental health support in schools, challenges

54 UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, *Mental Health in Displaced Child and Youth Populations: A Review of the Evidence and Conceptual Frameworks* (Florence: UNICEF, 2023). https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3741/file/UNICEF-Mental-Health-Displacement-2023.pdf.

55 Walther, et al., *supra note*, 46: e033658.

56 Joop T. V. M. De Jong, et al., "Addressing Challenges Faced by Young Refugees in the Netherlands", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 15 (2021): 8030. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11504942/.

57 Lehmkuhl, *supra note,* 6.

such as data gaps continue to hinder more targeted interventions[58].

Following the 2021 floods, Germany focused on crisis counselling and rebuilding efforts, providing affected schools with mental health resources to support students and staff alike[59]. The Netherlands' comprehensive pre-disaster planning helped reduce physical damage and enabled timely evacuations during the 2021 floods[60]. However, psychological distress remained high among affected residents, prompting the implementation of localised counselling and peer-support programmes to address post-flood mental health needs[61].

## 4. Policies and Recommendations

Both Germany and the Netherlands have developed strategies to address the mental health needs of youth, although their approaches differ considerably. In the Netherlands, the Child and Youth Act provides a decentralised framework for mental health services. This system emphasises early intervention, integrated care and the active involvement of local municipalities. National initiatives such as the Depression Prevention Programme and the Suicide Prevention Plan (2021–2025) aim to reduce the mental health burden among youth, with a particular focus on social media safety and mental health education in schools[62].

In Germany, the Social Code, Book VIII (SGB VIII) governs child and youth services, including provisions for mental health care. Germany's system is more

58 UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, "Mental Health in Displaced Child and Youth Populations: A Developmental and Family Systems Lens", 2023. https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3741/file/UNICEF-Mental-Health-Displacement-2023.pdf.

59 Lehmkuhl, *supra note,* 6.

60 Thijs Endendijk, et al., "Experience from the 2021 Floods in the Netherlands: Household Survey Results on Impacts and Responses", *Journal of Coastal and Riverine Flood Risk* 2 (Special Issue) (2023): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.59490/jcrfr.2023.0009.

61 Wouter Botzen, et al., "Avoiding Future Surprises after Acute Shocks: Long-Term Flood Risk Governance in the Netherlands", *Environmental Sciences Europe* 34 (2024): Article 960. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-024-00960-3.

62 Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS), *National Agenda on Suicide Prevention 2021–2025 and Multi-Annual Depression Prevention Programme* (The Hague: VWS, 2021). https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/netherlands/75-mental-health.

centralised than that of the Netherlands, with federal support for mental health services, including prevention and early intervention programmes. The Federal Association of the Psychosocial Centres for Refugees and Victims of Torture (BAfF e.V.) provide support for refugees[63], ensuring trauma recovery and mental health services are available, especially for displaced youth[64].

To further strengthen mental health support for displaced youth, both Germany and the Netherlands should consider the policy recommendations outlined below.

1. **Integrating Mental Health into Disaster Response Plans**
   Mental health professionals should be embedded within emergency response teams to provide early psychological interventions during climate-related disasters.
2. **Strengthening Youth-Focused Resilience Programmes**
   Expanding peer-support groups, school-based counselling, and life skills training can help displaced youth build emotional resilience and adapt to new environments.
3. **Expanding Trauma-Informed Education**
   Schools should have trained mental health professionals available to provide trauma-sensitive support to displaced students.
4. **Enhancing Family Support Services**
   Providing mental health resources for parents can strengthen family resilience, creating a more stable environment for children facing displacement.
5. **Improving the Collection of Data Regarding Displaced Youth**
   Both nations should invest in long-term studies to better understand the

63 Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). n.d. Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) Achtes Buch (VIII) – Kinder- und Jugendhilfe. Accessed September 27, 2025. https://www.bmfsfj.de/.

64 BAfF e.V. (Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft der psychosozialen Zentren für Flüchtlinge und Folteropfer). n.d. BAfF – National Working Group of Psychosocial Centers for Refugees and Victims of Torture. Accessed September 27, 2025. https://www.baff-zentren.de/.

mental health needs of displaced youth, enabling the development of more targeted interventions.

## Limitations

This analysis was based on a review of existing literature and available data. There are several limitations to consider.

- **Limited data regarding direct impacts:** There is a relative lack of specific research regarding the direct mental health impacts of climate change-induced displacement on children and youth in Germany and the Netherlands, as neither country has experienced large-scale internal displacement due to climate change.
- **Generalisability:** Findings from studies conducted in other countries may not be directly generalisable to the specific contexts of Germany and the Netherlands.
- **Complexity of mental health:** Mental health is influenced by a multitude of factors, making it difficult to isolate the specific impacts of climate change-induced displacement.
- **Evolving field:** The field of climate change and mental health is rapidly evolving, and new research is constantly emerging.

## Conclusions

Germany and the Netherlands have each developed distinct but effective approaches to addressing the mental health needs of displaced youth. Germany's trauma-focused model provides immediate psychological relief, ensuring that young people receive crisis support in the aftermath of extreme weather events. However, this approach does not place as much emphasis on long-term resilience-building.

In contrast, the Netherlands focuses on preventive mental health strategies,

aiming to equip young people with the skills and social networks necessary to cope with stress and uncertainty. While this method fosters long-term emotional well-being, it lacks the rapid-response interventions needed for immediate trauma care following displacement events.

An ideal solution would combine the strengths of each approach. By integrating Germany's trauma-focused crisis interventions with the Netherlands' community-based resilience programmes, displaced youth could receive both short-term psychological aid and learn long-term coping mechanisms. Future policies should aim to merge rapid-response trauma care with preventive mental health strategies, ensuring that children and adolescents affected by climate-induced displacement receive comprehensive and sustainable support.

Ultimately, as climate change continues to drive displacement, governments must prioritise mental health as a fundamental aspect of disaster response and migration policies. Strengthening cross-border collaborations, enhancing access to mental health services and improving data collection regarding displaced youth will be essential in creating a more effective, inclusive and adaptive support system for the next generation.

# KLIMATO KAITOS SUKELTO GYVENTOJO PERKĖLIMO POVEIKIS VAIKŲ IR JAUNIMO PSICHINEI SVEIKATAI: VOKIETIJOS IR NYDERLANDŲ LYGINAMOJI ANALIZĖ

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**Santrauka.** Klimato kaitos sukeltas gyventojų perkėlimas yra eskaluojanti krizė, neproporcingai paveikianti pažeidžiamas gyventojų grupes, tokias kaip vaikai ir jaunimas. Šiame tyrime nagrinėjamas tokio perkėlimo poveikis psichikos sveikatai Vokietijoje ir Nyderlanduose, daugiausia dėmesio skiriant teisinių sistemų, būsto sąlygų ir psichikos sveikatos paslaugų vaidmeniui formuojant atsparumą ir prisitaikymą. Naudojant lyginamąją analizę ir politikos peržiūros metodiką, tyrime vertinamos Vokietijos į traumą orientuotos psichikos sveikatos intervencijos, palyginti su Nyderlandų atsparumo stiprinimo strategijomis. Išvados rodo, kad Vokietijos taikomas metodas veiksmingai sprendžia neatidėliotino psichologinio streso problemą taikant į traumą orientuotą priežiūrą, tačiau sunkiai palaiko ilgalaikį atsparumą. Priešingai, Nyderlandai teikia pirmenybę prevencinėms strategijoms, kurios skatina ilgalaikę psichologinę gerovę, tačiau gali būti nepakankamos teikiant skubią paramą traumos atveju. Tyrime pabrėžiama, kad reikia integruotos psichikos sveikatos sistemos, kuri apjungtų neatidėliotiną traumos priežiūrą su ilgalaikėmis atsparumo stiprinimo priemonėmis. Siekiant sustiprinti paramą perkeltiems jaunuoliams, šiame tyrime rekomenduojama stiprinti tarpvalstybinį bendradarbiavimą, integruoti psichikos sveikatos paslaugas į reagavimo į nelaimes pastangas ir gerinti duomenų rinkimą, kad būtų galima formuoti įrodymais pagrįstą politiką.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** klimato kaita, priverstinis gyventojų perkėlimas, psichinė sveikata, intervencijos, traumos.