Climate Justice and the Right to Education

United Nations University (UNU-IAS)

Spring 2025

Location: 6th floor lecture room, Tokyo, Japan
Time: Wednesdays, 15:50~17:30

Lecturers: Nafissa Insebayeva, Jonghwi Park
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Office Hours: by appointment

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Course Description

With its devastating impacts on ecosystems, communities and people, climate change presents a great threat to human rights worldwide. Rising temperatures, deteriorating air and water quality, increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events exacerbate existing inequalities and expose vulnerable and marginalized populations to new vulnerabilities.
With nearly a quarter of a billion children experiencing schooling disruptions as a result of climate crises in 2024 (UNICEF), it is clear that climate change threatens the right to education, making it impossible to achieve the global sustainability goal of leaving no one behind.

This course is dedicated to exploring the complex relationship between climate justice and the right to education. Throughout the semester, students will examine the ethical, social, and political dimensions of climate change, deepening their understanding of how vulnerable populations – particularly in the Global South – are disproportionately affected by the rapidly changing global environment. Students will be introduced to relevant theoretical frameworks and case studies that highlight the core principles of climate justice, including equity, historical responsibility, and human rights.

The course stresses the important role education plays as both a tool for climate mitigation and adaptation and as a means of empowerment. Students will work on individual and group assignments that critically assess the challenges and opportunities associated with building climate resilient education systems. The course will culminate in a final project, where students will work in groups to develop practical, evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at addressing the intersection of climate change, education, and social justice.

By the end of the course, students will have a comprehensive understanding of climate justice, the role of education in climate change, and the tools needed to create impactful policies for resilient education systems.

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

By the end of the course, students should be able to:
- Understand key concepts of climate justice and its interconnectedness with the right to education;

- Analyse pertinent climate justice issues in their local contexts (region, country, community, etc.); and
- Apply interdisciplinary approaches to creating solutions to injustice issues in education faced by marginalized and vulnerable communities in the context of climate change;
- Develop data-informed policy recommendations for building climate-resilient and inclusive education and lifelong learning systems for all.

Requirements and Grading Policy

All students are expected to complete the required readings before each class. The course requirements also include active class participation, individual assignments, and a final group report, detailing policy recommendations for building inclusive and climate-resilient education systems of a selected country, taking into account various factors, including but not limited to patterns of climate change, trends in human mobilities and demography, social and economic status, national education and/or lifelong learning systems, and infrastructure. Students will then make a group presentation based on their report, highlighting key findings and policy recommendations.

1. **Class attendance and active class participation (10%):** 80% of the class attendance is required. 2% deducted per absence unless pre-approved.
2. **Written assignment (30%):** Individual writing assignment (2,500 words max, excl. references) – by 15:49 on 21 May 2025 via Moodle.
3. **Final presentation (20%):** Oral presentation of the final report on 15 July during the class (Group) – please submit your slides via Moodle before the class (by 15:49 on 9 July 2025)
4. **Final report (40%):** Group assignment to write a report for a government of your choice, containing practical and feasible policy measures and recommendations for ensuring climate-resilient inclusive education systems. - by 23:59 on 23 July 2025 via Moodle

Class Participation

The course requires students to attend all classes, to arrive on time, to complete the readings and to participate actively in class discussions. This means speaking during each and every class. Some sessions may involve interactive discussions with all participants, for which preparation ahead of time will be essential. At the discretion of the instructor, frequent late arrivals or absences may result in a lower grade. Please note that the first session is of particular importance and cannot be missed. Students are also strongly encouraged to regularly follow the news to keep up with international developments, as these events will be reflected in the class discussions. Relevant news sites and reporting archives will be shared by the instructor during the class.

Individual Written Assignment

In order to develop a thorough understanding of the unique contexts and constraints faced by the countries in the Global South, students will be asked to write an individual paper on the following topics for the country of their choice:

I. **General background of the country:** Geography, socio-economic context, demography, and trends in major impacts of climate change, etc.
II. **Main challenges pertaining to climate change** and their impact on vulnerable and marginalized communities (e.g. flooding and displacement, WASH in schools)
III. **Current issues in education and potential needs in the context of climate justice** and fundamental human rights, with specific attention to excluded groups.

Assignments should be no more than 2,500 words, not including a works cited page. Quality visualizations such as charts and graphs are strongly encouraged. Reference to key policy and strategic frameworks, data, and existing evidence is recommended. Students are expected to edit the assignments based on instructor and classmates' feedback, as these may serve as chapters in the final report.

The document must be in MS format and single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font. The papers must have a title, a proper introduction and conclusion section and all material that is used to support the student's argument must be clearly cited. For the in-text citations and the bibliography, we suggest that students use APA or Harvard style citations. Be consistent in using the style once you choose a style.

Final Report:

The final report for the class should be a synthesis report containing a set of recommendations for a developing country of the group's choice, explicitly informed by currently available data. The groups are encouraged to choose a country from one of the members' individual assignments (individual written assignment) so that the group can build up the final assignment on the findings of the previous assignment.

The requirements of the final report include:
- *Introduction to Climate Justice and Education Rights within the context of the specific country.*
  Discuss how climate change affects the right to education, particularly focusing on the most vulnerable groups. This can include case studies or examples that highlight unique challenges and responses. Discuss how climate change has specifically impacted education in this context.
- *Overview of existing data on relevant issues in the context of climate change.*
  Identify significant gaps in current data, explaining how these gaps hinder effective policymaking and support for vulnerable and marginalized communities.
- *Application of interdisciplinary methods (such as a combination of sociology, environmental science, education theory, and public policy) to propose solutions for the challenges faced by migrants and displaced individuals.*
  Explain how these approaches can be used to ensure educational access and quality for these groups in the face of climate change.
- *Specific, data-informed policy recommendations, based on data analysis and interdisciplinary approaches.*
  These recommendations should aim at building climate-resilient and inclusive education systems, with a focus on lifelong learning opportunities for all, including migrants and displaced individuals, aligned with country priorities and strategic frameworks. As part of the analysis, the analysis can highlight the pros and cons of various policy options, or how these policies can be implemented at various levels

(local, national, international) and by different stakeholders (governments, NGOs, educational institutions, etc.).

The final report should be no more than 4,000 words, not including a works cited page. Quality visualizations such as charts and graphs are strongly encouraged. The document must be in MS format and single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font. The papers must have a title, a proper introduction and policy recommendation section and all material that is used to support the students' argument must be clearly cited. For the in-text citations and the bibliography, we suggest that students use APA style or Harvard style citations.

The final report for the class should be a set of recommendations based on a synthesis of the pre-existing assignment that is compiled to give a background for the nation in four distinct chapters, and then based on this data, the students are to make a series of recommendations for the nation state in the final chapter.

Note: the important thing is that students propose a series of actions that will enable the nation to meet its goals, either working within the country, or bilaterally with international partners.

Students are expected to write the final chapter of 5-6 pages in length, which will be in the same document as the proceeding four chapters. The document must be in MS format and single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font. The papers must have a title, a proper introduction and conclusion section and all material that is used to support the student's argument must be clearly cited. For the in-text citations and the bibliography, we suggest that students use APA style citations. For a reference for APA style citations see: https://www.umuc.edu/library/libhow/apa_examples.cfm.

<u>*Final Presentation:*</u>

Students will have 20 minutes to present the group's final report, using a PowerPoint or similar style of presentation platform. More details will be shared during the course.

Course Outline

		Title	Date (tentative)	Instructors/ Invited Speakers if any
1	Introduction	**Overview of climate change and its global impact** • Scientific facts of climate change (causes and effects) • Introduction to disparities in how climate change affects different regions and communities • Course overview	April 2	Nafissa Insebayeva
2		**International legal frameworks and climate change treaties** • Paris Agreement (goals and mechanisms) • UN agencies and international governance on climate change (UNFCCC, IPCC, etc.)	April 9	TBD

3	Fundamentals of Climate Justice	**Theories of justice** • Introduction to theories of justice • Implications for climate policy • Existing approaches to climate justice	April 16	Nafissa Insebayeva
4		**Environmental and climate justice movements** • Historical and contemporary movements • Environmental legacy of colonialism	April 23	Nafissa Insebayeva
5		**The role of youth in climate change** • The rise of youth leaders in climate justice • Youth- and child-inclusive climate action	April 30	Nafissa Insebayeva
6		**Gender and environment** • Eco-feminism • Gender-responsiveness of current climate policies	May 7	Nafissa Insebayeva
7	Education as a Fundamental Human Right	**The role of education in climate change** • Education as a tool for mitigation and adaptation	May 7	TBD
8		**Education as a fundamental human right** • Rights-based approaches (right to education) • SDG4 Quality education • Data-driven policymaking	May 28	TBD
9		**Inclusive education** • Indigenous communities	June 4	Giselle Miole
10		**Education in the face of climate change and displacement** • Comparing the educational challenges faced by refugees and climate displaced persons • Main barriers to education induced by climate change and related displacement • Samples of policy recommendations to address barriers and challenges	June 11	TBD
11	Climate resilient education	**Building climate resilient education systems** • Safe schools • Teacher and curriculum for climate change education • Climate change literacy • DRR	June 18	TBD
12		**Action-oriented pedagogies and climate change** • The failure of environmental education and the emergence of AOP	June 25	Jonghwi Park
13		**The role of technology in building resilient education systems** • Opportunities and challenges	July 2	Joao Papel
14		**Final presentations and feedback** • Policy proposal related to climate justice and education	July 9	Nafissa Insebayeva
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Important Information

Class Conduct & Etiquette

Students are expected to arrive on time and not to engage in disruptive behavior during class. This includes, among other things, private side conversations, the use of cell-phones and other electronic devices, or the reading of newspapers. Cell-phones should be switched off and stored in the bag. We wish to create an atmosphere of open and tolerant discussion in the classroom and request students to recognize every individual's right to have an opinion. The lecturer and other students should be treated with dignity and respect, in particular in discussions on contentious political issues where a diversity of opinions is likely to arise. However, we also recognize that there are limits to tolerance and the lecturer reserves the right to request disciplinary action against any student who violates this policy or repeatedly shows disruptive behavior in class.

Computer Use in Class

The use of computers (including tablets) in the classroom is restricted to taking notes, reading course materials or searching for course related information on the internet. Any disruption of the class by cell phones, instant messaging programs or other communication devices will not be tolerated. The lecturer reserves the right to revoke this permission if a student is found using a computer for any non-course related activities.

Plagiarism & Academic Misconduct

Please be aware that the consequences of plagiarism are severe, and students found guilty of academic misconduct will be punished in accordance with UNU's academic honesty policies. The lecturer reserves the right to run all assignments through an anti-plagiarism software provided by the UNU. If evidence of academic misconduct on the assignments should be found, the assignment will receive a failing grade. In case of repeated violations of academic conduct, the student may receive a failing grade for the entire course and will be reported to the appropriate authorities for disciplinary action.

Invited Speakers/Lecturers Bio
TBD