

A Letter from Your Chair and Co-Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2019 World Youth Summit! It is our honor to serve as your Chair and Co-Chairs of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the three-day conference.

As you join this committee as a delegate, you have been assigned a country. In order to play the role of a delegate for a country well, we suggest that you should first go through this study guide to gain a basic understanding of the topic. Next, we strongly encourage you to do further research on specific subtopics that you consider relevant to the main topic so that you will be ready to come up with concrete solutions and to explain them with good details to fellow delegates. Also, please be sure to research the country you are assigned thoroughly in order to come up with some solutions that are consistent to your country's existing policies.

If you have any question, or simply want to share your thoughts on the topic, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are always happy to help you with your preparation for the conference so as to ensure interesting and fruitful debates. We look forward to meeting you all in person at 2019 World Youth Summit!

Best regards,

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TOPIC: The Issue of Climate Migration and Disaster Displacement

COMMITTEE: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

An introduction to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as the UN Refugee Agency, is a specialized organization governed by the United Nation General Assembly (GA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its mandate was defined by the 1950 UNHCR Statute following Second World War to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes. Since then, UNHCR has served as a leader to coordinate international actions concerning its prime roles—to safeguard refugees, and to solve the problems refugees face in their attempt to escape conflicts or threats, or while they look for asylum, as well as when they try to resettle in a new country or area. Though UNHCR mainly aims to provide aid for refugees, it also helps displaced people who are mostly affected by disasters, and also those who do not precisely fit the definition of “refugee” according to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Now, UNHCR assists refugees and displaced people in humanitarian aid such as protection, nutrition supplements, resettlement, integration in new countries, and other necessary aids.

An Overview of the Topic

L. Craig Johnstone, deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, publicly announced in the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan (2008), that “by 2050, up to 250 million people will be left displaced and homeless due to climate change impacts.” These impacts include sea-level rise, floods, famine, drought, desertification and other negative impacts on the earth’s ecosystem. Though conflicts and wars indeed directly cause refugee crises, climate change and the resulting extreme weather conditions have, in recent years, often driven people from their homeland in large numbers. The so-called “climate refugees” have become an increasingly urgent problem that deserves international attention.

Though the world is already taking actions to react to climate migration and disaster displacement, there are still many problems these migrants and displaced people are confronted with. First of all, the word “climate refugee” has no standard definition and is not recognized as any category of refugee under the international law, which means they are often neglected and aren’t qualified for protection. This also causes vague obligations of international community which made resettlement and integration difficult to achieve. Second, foreign governments often show hostility to these migrants since food and water shortages have long been a global issue, and their move-in will become a potential factor that might provoke conflicts over limited resources, and is also perceived as serious threat to national security. Third, even if they manage to migrate to a new country, they affect the country in many aspects including development, national security, and human, indigenous, and cultural rights.

The international community, despite challenges mentioned above, has given a response to this problem, i.e. the Nansen Initiative, which is an inter-governmental agenda for disaster-induced cross-border displacement. Its aim is not to construct a new legal standard but to reach consensus between states and provide principles for countries to follow. The world has indeed done something about the issue, but climate change has brought about more disasters of a more serious nature at a far higher frequency than the world is prepared to deal with. With the issue growing more serious, consensus and more comprehensive strategies of resettlement and integration are urgently needed for the international community to cooperate effectively to help these climate change induced migrants and displaced in a timely fashion.

Definition of Key Terms

Climate Change

A long-term shift in worldwide weather patterns mainly caused by human activities leading to rising temperature, increased concentration of greenhouse gases and more.

Refugee

Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. People who are granted refugee status by the hosting country or UNHCR are also refugees.

Human Mobility

Human mobility is a term that refers to all aspects of the movement of people, which includes three forms:

- a) displacement: forced movement of people, usually refugees under war conflicts, economic changes, or natural disasters;
- b) migration: voluntary movement of people, usually for the seek of better living condition or employment opportunities;
- c) planned relocation: planned process of settling people to a new location, usually launched by government.

Internally Displaced People

People who have been forced to leave their homes but haven't crossed an internationally recognized state border due to wars, violence, or climatic factors.

Climate Migrant

People who are forced or voluntarily choose to leave their habitual homes, either temporarily or permanently, and move within their countries or abroad due to environmental causes, such as sudden-onset disasters like typhoons, earthquakes, that force inhabitants to move, or slow-onset disasters such as rising of sea levels, that gradually make their homes uninhabitable.

Disaster Displacement

Situations where people are forced to leave their habitual homes after or before an foreseeable disaster. The situation often happens when the people are exposed to the threat of natural hazard and are too vulnerable to withstand the impacts of the catastrophe.

Cross-Border Disaster-Displacement

Situations similar to “disaster displacement” but particularly those who flee across borders.

A Historic Look on the Issue

The Rise of Climate Migration and Disaster Displacement

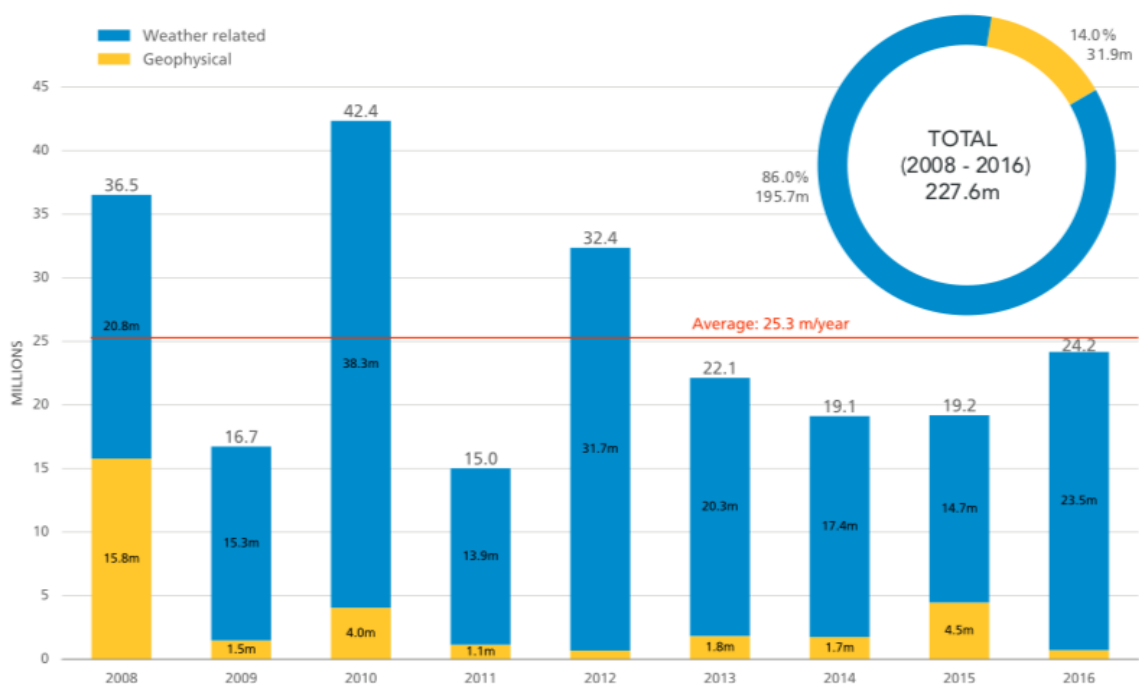
The term “refugee” was defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, along with the legal obligations of States to protect them. Before the Convention, the earlier international refugee instruments only apply to specific groups of refugees. According to the Convention, “a refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”. Nevertheless, in today’s world, the definition of refugee cannot cover all people that are suffering displacement due to certain reasons, and those affected by climate change are one.

According to UNHCR report in 2015, “an annual average of 21.5 million people have been forcibly displaced by weather-related sudden onset hazards – such as floods, storms, wildfires and extreme temperatures”. That is, for every second, one person is displaced due to climatic reasons. As climate change turns serious, the problem of climate refugee increasingly drew global attention. In September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly has clearly addressed the increasing number of refugees and migrants as one of the leading challenges of our times. Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary-General then, said that “The number of migrants is expected to continue to grow as a result of trade, labour and skill shortages, the ease of travel and communications, rising inequality and climate change.” Hence, climate refugees have already been acknowledged as a significant crisis that requires global concern.

Causes and Cases

Though the issue of climate migration and disaster displacement attracted more attention in recent years, it has always been an ongoing issue. It is evaluated that 33 million people were internally displaced in 2012 due to sudden-onset disasters such as earthquakes, floods, storms. Other sudden-onset disasters such as heat waves, famine, and hurricanes, and the slow-onset disaster or the changing environment such as sea-level rise, drought, desertification are continuing claiming thousands of lives and causing displacement. Some examples: droughts in Somalia in 2011 and 2012, floods in Pakistan between 2010 and 2012, storms and flooding in Myanmar in 2013, and the typhoons in the Philippines between 2011 and 2013.

Global warming causes serious rising temperatures that directly result in the melting of glaciers and ice caps. The huge amount of extra water that used to exist in solid form (i.e. ice) enters into world's water circulation and causes sea-level rises and frequent flooding, which threatens the survival of island states and low-elevation countries such as Bangladesh, Maldives, Venice, Papua New Guinea. Moreover, extreme weather conditions lead to far more frequent cases of drought, which causes famine. If the extreme dry weather persists, formerly fertile land will lose its productivity. In extreme cases when drought lasts, which are seen more and more often, the land may lose its productivity all together and desertification happens. The uninhabitable land then forces people to move internally or cross borders to seek more habitable places. Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya are estimated to lose more than 1,000 square kilometers of productive land each year to desertification. Other Asian countries and African countries are also especially vulnerable to this situation since they mostly lack adequate resources, capacity and preparation to deal with additional population that loses self-reliance and becomes dependent on state aid for survival.



Source: IDMC

Figure 1: New displacements by disasters, 2008 to 2016
 (IDMC: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of Norwegian Refugee Council)

Absolute numbers

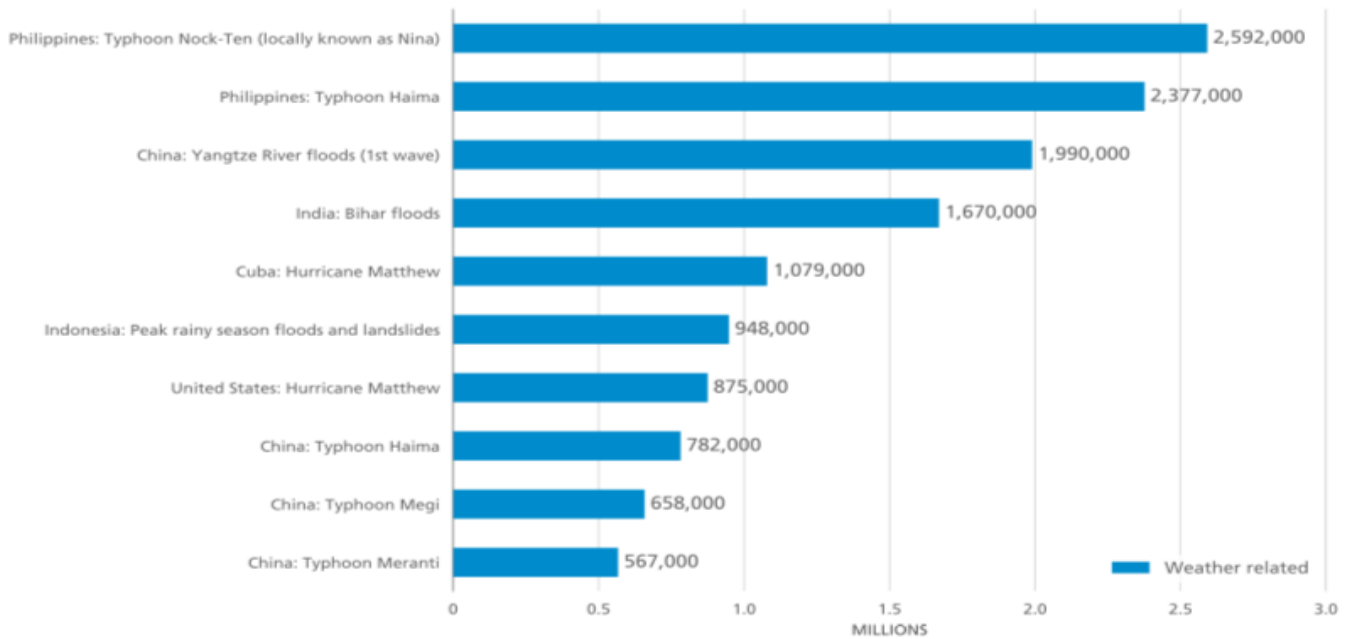


Figure 2: The ten largest disaster displacement events of 2016 (source: IDMC)

Current Situation of Migrants and the Displaced

One major problem these migrants and the displaced face is that they might not be able to be categorized as refugees under the current definition of “refugee” by the 1951 Refugee Convention. This not only results in the negligence and lack of protection but also make it difficult to calculate precise statistics. The movement of the internally displaced and the move-in of cross-border disaster-displacement people also bring problems and challenges to the governments of these neighboring areas or countries. Conflicts over the obviously limited resources and threats to national security might occur. However, these are just the tip of the iceberg. To solve the whole problem radically, in addition to resettlement and integration, we also have to come up with a comprehensive solution for the long-term process of migration for those exposed to threat of weather-related factors. Thus, the United Nations and various organizations have taken steps to tackle the problem and assist the countries in need. So far, 132 countries have signed and ratified Paris Agreement (2015), and the Nansen Initiative, pledged in 2011 and launched in the following year by Switzerland and Norway, has also been one of the recent international efforts to address this issue.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Human Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR has engaged in work to deal with disaster displacement since 1999. Its first policy regarding climate change was published in 2008, classifying three main areas in which the agency is involved: operations management, protection strategies, and advocacy. In addition, the High Commissioner established Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on climate change to make sure that UNHCR accepted consistent measures, monitored relevant developments and put effort into climate change. Furthermore, UNHCR's 2017-2021 Strategic Directions, which emphasize on five core directions to provide advanced protection for refugees and displaced people, are all relevant to solutions to disaster displacement caused by climate change.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The mandate of OHCHR is to promote human rights, as well as leading global human rights efforts to speak out against humanitarian violations worldwide. In the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, OHCHR issued "Key Messages on Human Rights and Climate Change" in order to emphasize the importance of obligation and responsibilities of nations on climate change-related protocol, actions, and approaches. Moreover, as the secretariat of the UN human rights system, OHCHR also works very closely with UNHCR in order to provide expertise on how to accommodate human rights into its work practically.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP has been heavily involved in environmental and climate issues. As the leading global environmental authority, its main goal is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in keeping the balance between improving quality of human life and protecting the environment from being harmed. Noticing that climate change is one of the most pervasive ongoing issue, UNEP works on this issue through several aspects including science, policy, technology, and finance. It is also assisting countries to develop national programs in order to implement the Paris Agreement. Owing to partially overlaps between the environmental aspects of UNHCR and UNEP, the two organizations had extensive cooperation in the following areas:

- 1) combating deforestation, soil erosion and desertification, pollution and depletion of freshwater resources,
- 2) development of Environmental Guidelines to provide a comprehensive framework for actions in the field and policy levels in refugee-affected scenarios, and
- 3) environmental Education and Training, including the implementation of indicators for gender and environment-sensitive management measures for refugee-affected scenarios, field projects, post conflict environmental impact appraisal, and awareness rising.

Previous Attempts

2012 Nansen Initiative

Understanding that people uprooted by natural disasters become increasingly vulnerable as climate change worsens, the UNHCR made efforts throughout 2011 to encourage the formulation of a global guiding framework. With most states' hope to retain control over their protection work at the UNHCR Ministerial conference, Norway and Switzerland decided to launch an intergovernmental consultative process that gathers more information to bridge the protection gap, build consensus between states and draft a non-binding guideline. In the following year, they launched the Nansen Initiative, which is based on the UNFCCC Cancun Agreement (2010) and the Nansen Principles.

2015 Protection Agenda

The Nansen Initiative takes into account previous practices adopted as well as varying challenges faced in different regions by conducting research and regional consultations in the Pacific, Central America, the Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia and South Asia. In 2015, the results were consolidated into the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change (Protection Agenda) at a global intergovernmental consultation in Geneva, and was adopted by 109 governmental delegations. The Nansen Initiative is a tentative first step regarding international policymaking for cross-borders displaced people while the Protection Agenda offers a useful toolbox with concrete solutions. It provides exhaustive and effective approaches that can be incorporated by States and organizations into their normative frameworks according to their specific situation. With the intention to actually solve the problem, the Protection Agenda is divided into three parts:

- 1) protection on cross-border disaster-displaced persons, i.e. identification, and humanitarian aid,

- 2) management of disaster displacement risk in the country of origin, i.e. threat prevention from disasters, planned relocation, and help for internally displaced person,
- 3) possible future actions, i.e. data collection, and knowledge enhancement.

Fulfilling the protection agenda requires “increased preparedness, solidarity and collaboration” by states, regional organizations, the international community, as well as streamlined leadership within every country. States underscored the importance of cooperation and coordination across different policy areas and with other stakeholders. To sum up, the protection agenda draws together effective approaches and sets out an array of suggestions and actions for future work. Nevertheless, disaster responses and coherent strategies often requires bi-national and multi-national cooperation; thus, further international collaborations and coordination are urgently needed to make this progress a more practical and comprehensive one.

2016 Platform on Disaster Displacement

Thus, in 2016, Germany launched Platform on disaster displacement (PDD) at the World Humanitarian Summit. It is a follow-up to the Nansen Initiative consultative process that aims to implement the Protection Agenda by coordinating cross-disciplinary action and cooperation. The PDD consists of three pillars: a Steering Group, an Advisory Committee, and a Coordination Unit. The steering group, which is led and directed by the chair, is in charge of the whole organization and steers the platform. Member states and the European Union represent through the UN Permanent Missions in Geneva and are supported by the Coordination Unit, with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as standing invitees to the Group. The Advisory Committee strengthens participation through two ways, providing expert input and advice to the Steering Group, and supporting implementation with the Coordination Unit.

PDD’s 2016 to 2019 Strategic Framework and Workplan, mainly supported by UNHCR and IOM, prioritizes the following areas of work: addressing knowledge and data gaps, enhancing the use of identified effective practices, mainstreaming human mobility challenges across relevant action areas, and promoting policy and normative development in gap areas.

UNHCR, IOM and PDD

UNHCR has been a leader in coordinating international effort to help climate refugees and also a staunch supporter of the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda. It not

only assists states in implementing the Protection Agenda but also cooperates with PDD on different projects to minimize the effect of the displacement problem. For example, UNHCR, the government of Germany, and PDD have just co-hosted a side event to UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom) in 2017, at which detailed discussions on concrete solutions to disaster displacement were conducted. PDD also supports the development and use of UNHCR's Guidelines on Temporary Protection or Stay Arrangements as humanitarian protection.

On the other hand, IOM, an intergovernmental migration agency and key partner of PDD, established Migration, Environment and Climate Change (MECC) Division in order to manage environmental migration, namely, to minimize environmental migrants, to ensure assistance and protection, as well as to facilitate migration as an adaptation strategy. IOM works with PDD and UNHCR on 2016 to 2019 Strategic Framework and Workplan through MECC and combines the framework into IOM programmes to ensure the rights of people displaced due to climate change. PDD also coordinates with IOM on humanitarian visas, the Migration Crisis Operational Framework and the Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative.

With many previous actions attempting to solve the problem of climate migration and disaster displacement, the world has finally woken up to these very real and serious problems. However, all the effort so far has only scratched the surface of the problems. Many more practical problems still remain unsolved and need further international discussions and cooperation, including well-recognized definition of key terms, comprehensive programs, solution to potential threats, and effective collaborations between nations, just to name a few.

Questions to Consider

Dealing with climate migration and disaster displacement is a huge and intricate task. Though human rights and safety are the top priorities we should consider, resource shortages, potential threats to national security, and social problems that might follow cannot be neglected in a comprehensive solution. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the issue thoroughly. Here are some questions to consider:

- a) What key terms are remained undefined and need further definition for the problem to be solved?

- b) What kind of assistance can member states, UN or NGOs provide for people driven from their homeland by extreme weather conditions brought on by climate change?
- c) Who should provide and what measures should be taken to help immigrants get accustomed to the cultures in the new countries they move in?
- d) What are the potential threats that will occur after the migration or resettlement, and what measures can be adopted to prevent them?
- e) What other solutions can be implemented for countries which are very likely to suffer from climate change or vulnerable to natural disasters?

Conclusion

The problem of climate migration and disaster displacement can be roughly split into two parts—prevention and post-disaster protection. For prevention, we should think about how to manage potential risks to natural hazards and, if unavoidable, come up with a long-term planned migration plan. As for the post-disaster protection, how to give timely assistance to victims in the aftermath of natural disasters and the establishment of a system that protects and provide aid for resettlement should be the priorities. In addition, resource distribution and national security problems that may emerge after mass migration are also complicated problems waiting to be solved. The UNHCR devotes full efforts to refugee issues, but to solve the problem effectively, it requires not only UNHCR but also the collaboration of all nations and organizations concerned. Therefore, every state should offer assistance and work together to deal with this ongoing issue to ensure that people displaced by climate change-related disasters are helped and their basic human rights to survival, a safe place to live in, and freedom from fear are safeguarded, just like other recognized categories of refugees.

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