



GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(GA)

Addressing a political and economic international framework to recognize climate migrants as a refugee category.

**Chairs:
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Committee Background:

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) is the main policy-making organ of the Organization. Comprising all Member States, it provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter of the United Nations. Each of the 193 Member States of the United Nations has an equal vote.

The UNGA also makes key decisions for the UN, including:

- appointing the Secretary-General on the recommendation of the Security Council
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- approving the UN budget



Established in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly occupies a central position as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. Comprised of all 193 Members of the United Nations, it provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter. It also plays a central role in the process of standard-setting and the codification of international law.

The Assembly meets from September to December each year (main part), and thereafter, from January to September (resumed part), as required, including taking up outstanding reports from the Fourth and Fifth Committees. Also, during the resumed part of the session, the Assembly considers current issues during high-level thematic debates organized by the President of the General Assembly. During that period, the Assembly traditionally conducts informal consultations on a wide range of substantive topics towards the adoption of new resolutions.

Topic Background:

Every year millions of people are forced to leave their homes, jobs, and families because of the various effects of climate change. Others are not even able to migrate and are forced to remain in exponentially dangerous areas, which places them in vulnerable situations. Forced displacement due to natural disasters threatens the human rights of those involved and primarily affects individuals and communities facing social inequality, gender, age, class, indigeneity, disability, or health conditions. Although States must respect and safeguard the human rights of people in their territory and under their jurisdiction, they also have migration policies that may put the integrity of migrants at risk.

Climate migrants are individuals who are forced to move from their territory of origin, mostly because of direct (natural disasters) and indirect (environmental degradation) climate impacts, either temporarily or permanently. Although several countries have migration policies that help regulate the flow of people who transit internationally, it cannot be denied that the displacement of these individuals has diverse internal and transnational consequences.



It's important to distinguish between climate migrants and refugees. Refugees are defined under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol as individuals fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. This definition does not recognize those displaced by environmental factors. In consequence, many individuals displaced by climate change lack formal legal status or protection, leaving millions of people vulnerable and unprotected.

Climate migration is not only an **environmental issue** but also a **multifaceted economic, social, and cultural challenge**. The displacement of millions due to climate-related disasters has profound consequences for both **receiving communities** and **migrant populations**, affecting labor markets, financial stability, housing accessibility, and social cohesion. These impacts highlight the **urgent need for structured policies** to manage migration, support displaced communities, and mitigate tensions between local populations and migrants.

One of the most **immediate economic effects** of climate migration is its impact on **labor markets**. Migrants often compete with local workers for **jobs and wages**, potentially **lowering salaries** in specific sectors while also **increasing workforce availability**. This **dual effect** can create **economic instability**, particularly in lower-income urban areas where job opportunities are already scarce.

Another major consequence is **housing market disruption**. A rapid influx of displaced people **increases demand for housing**, causing **rental prices and property values to rise**. In cities already experiencing housing shortages, this leads to **higher living costs, financial stress for low-income residents, and the expansion of informal settlements**. Moreover, migrants' need for **financial services and safety net programs** may **crowd out residents** from social welfare initiatives such as housing assistance and food security programs. This puts pressure on **public services** and creates **resentment in host communities**.



Beyond economic challenges, climate migration **fractures communities and disrupts social cohesion**. Displaced individuals lose **social networks, cultural traditions, and informal support systems**, which are essential for economic survival and emotional well-being. The **loss of identity** among climate migrants—especially **indigenous peoples and rural communities**—further isolates them in their new environments.

Moreover, **linguistic and cultural barriers** make integration difficult, leading to **discrimination, exclusion, and mental health struggles**. Those who migrate often **struggle to support their customs**, and those left behind in depopulated areas face **social and economic decline**. In worst-case scenarios, these disruptions can **trigger political tensions, nationalism, and social unrest**, and worsening migration crises globally.

Timeline:

- **1951**, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: Establishes the international definition of refugees, however, it does not recognize climate and environmental displacement.
- **1990**, IPCC First Assessment Report: This report was the first one published that warned about how climate change could become a major driver of human mobility.
- **2004**, Indian Ocean Tsunami: One of the largest recorded natural disasters, it displaced 1.7 million people.
- **2010**, Cancun Adaption Framework: First formal recognition of climate migration in international discussions.
- **2015**, Paris Agreement: Acknowledge climate change as a driver of migration, however it didn't include binding legal protections.
- **2016**,
- **2017**, Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria: Massive displaced thousands, exposing weakness in disaster response and urban resilience in the U.S. and the Caribbean.



- **2018**, Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: First non-binding UN agreement acknowledging climate migration as a global issue, though without legal enforcement.
- **2020**, International Displacement Monitoring Centre Report: The IDMC report reveals that natural disasters displaced more people than armed conflicts in the past ten years.
- **2021**, Loane Teitona Case: The first case in which an individual sought asylum as a climate refugee.
- **2023**, Record High Internal Displacement Due to Climate Disasters: Over 32.6 million displacements due to climate-related disasters, with rural areas suffering economic collapse and cities struggling with overpopulation.

Position of nations:

- **Somalia:** The climate change in Somalia has had a devastating impact on Somalia, worsening challenges of drought and extreme food insecurity, Although, flash flooding in March 2023 affected 460,000 habitants in Somalia, displacing tens of thousands. The current political instability has made it harder and more challenging to address its climate crisis and protect vulnerable communities.
- **Afghanistan:** Since the retake of control by the Taliban in 2021, the country has experienced fragility in foreign aid flows and an economic collapse. Meanwhile, Afghanistan is experiencing its worst drought in 27 years, while in some other regions, people are suffering due to intense flooding, diminishing food production and displacing thousands from their homes. An estimated 29.2 million people in Afghanistan require humanitarian assistance.
- **Sudan:** A country with high fragility and low climate readiness, with increased vulnerability to climate disasters. Better climate resiliency is essential to ensure the safety of citizens from climate change shocks like severe floods that affected over 90,000 people in 2022.
- **Sweden:** The Sweden law books had provisions protecting people unable to return to their countries of origin due to environmental disasters, these were



repealed in 2016 and 2021. This continues the trajectory of more restrictive reforms designed to curtail migration to Sweden.

- **Germany:** The German government policy discussion on climate change and migration brought a diversity of briefings, research papers, and recommendations. Furthermore, the government in 2019 debated a proposal given by the Green Party to create the “climate passport”.
- **India:** In 2020 it was estimated that 14 million people in India were forced to migrate as a consequence of extreme weather events, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC). Even though India is the seventh most climate-vulnerable country in the world facing the challenge of climate migration, the government does not have concrete policies in place to address this problematic situation.

Key terms:

- **Migrants:** A migrant is someone who chooses to move, not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives through work opportunities, education, family reunification, or other reasons.
- **Refugees:** Article 1 of the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
- **Climate migrants:** People displaced due to environmental factors, such as natural disasters, desertification, or extreme weather events (hurricanes, droughts).
- **Climate refugee:** People displaced due to climate-related events, seeking international protection because of imminent danger in their home countries.
- **Environmental displacement:** The forced movement of people due to environmental changes.
- **Urban stress:** The economic, infrastructural, and social pressure placed on cities due to an influx of migrants, leading to housing shortages, overloaded services, and rising living costs.
- **Rural depopulation:** The decline of population in rural areas.



- **Internally Displaced Persons:** People are forced to migrate within their own country due to conflict, disasters, or climate change, without crossing international borders.
- **1951 Refugee Convention:** The key international treaty defining refugee status and protections.
- **Global Compact for Migration (2018):** A non-binding international agreement acknowledging climate migration and proposing strategies for managing displacement, but without legal protection.
- **Resilience Strategies:** Policies and programs designed to help communities withstand climate impacts and reduce forced migration.

Guiding questions:

1. What are the main differences between climate migrants, climate refugees, and traditional refugees under international law and your country's policies?
2. Why does the 1951 Refugee Convention not recognize climate displacement as a reason for refugee status? Should it be amended?
3. What legal mechanisms currently exist to protect climate migrants in your country? Are they effective?
4. How does the Global Compact for Migration (2018) address climate-induced displacement, and what are its limitations?
5. Has your country proposed any humanitarian visas or protection mechanisms for climate migrants? How successful have these policies been?
6. How does climate migration contribute to urban stress in your country, and which cities are most affected?
7. What are the main economic and social consequences in your country of rapid climate migration in urban areas?
8. How do housing shortages, infrastructure pressure, and labor market changes affect both migrants and host communities in your country?
9. What strategies is your country implementing to absorb climate migrants without worsening inequality and resource shortages?
10. How does climate migration affect the rural economy and food security in your country?



11. What policies can be implemented to support rural resilience and prevent forced displacement in your country?
12. What role should regional agreements play in managing climate migration flows (e.g., EU policies, Pacific Island agreements, African Union frameworks)?
13. How can the private sector and NGOs contribute to solutions for urban stress and climate displacement?
14. How can your country integrate climate adaptation measures with migration policies to reduce the need for forced migration?

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