

# Oxford GlobalMUN - SHSID

Model United Nations Conference

牛津大学 - 上海中学国际部国际模拟联合国大会

## 2024

# United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)



Oxford  
GlobalMUN

April 4th - 6th, 2024

at Shanghai High School International Division

# OxfordGlobal



United Nations High Commissioner  
For Refugees  
(UNHCR)  
Background guide

# Table of contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table of contents .....  | 2  |
| Introduction to the Committee .....  | 4  |
| Topic A: Improving Access to Education for Refugees.....   | 6  |
| Statement of the Problem .....   | 6  |
| History of the Problem .....   | 6  |
| Current Situation.....   | 10 |
| Relevant UN Actions .....  | 18 |
| Proposed Solutions.....  | 19 |
| Questions a Resolution Must Answer .....   | 23 |
| Bloc Positions .....   | 24 |
| Suggestions for Further Research.....  | 24 |
| Topic B: Climate Change and Displacement.....  | 26 |
| Statement of the Problem.....  | 26 |
| Current Situation.....   | 32 |
| Climate change and displacement worldwide .....  | 32 |
| Relevant UN Actions .....  | 40 |
| Actions on climate change.....   | 40 |
| Outcomes of COP27: Establishment of Loss and Damage Fund and significance for climate displacement ..... | 41 |
| Relevant UN Actions in East Africa .....   | 42 |
| UN Peacekeeping missions .....   | 42 |
| UNHCR support for refugees and displaced people.....   | 42 |
| Proposed Solutions.....  | 43 |
| Policies to address climate change and displacement .....  | 43 |
| Questions a Resolution Must Answer .....   | 47 |
| Bloc Positions .....   | 48 |
| Developing countries overview .....  | 48 |
| Developed countries overview .....   | 48 |
| Refugee host countries outside the region.....   | 49 |
| Countries with extensive interests in the region .....   | 50 |
| Suggestions for Further Research.....  | 51 |
| On climate change and displacement in general .....  | 51 |

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| On East Africa..... | 52 |
| Bibliography .....  | 53 |

# Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 by the UN General Assembly with the mandate of protecting and safeguarding the rights of refugees<sup>1</sup>. In addition to refugees who have fled across international borders, UNHCR also provides support to those who have been forcibly internally displaced, former refugees who have returned to their home country, and people who are stateless or of disputed nationality<sup>2</sup>. Originally established in order to assist the millions of Europeans who had been displaced or made homeless by the Second World War and given only a three-year mandate to do so, the work of UNHCR's activities have since increased vastly in scope: today, the organisation maintains a presence in 137 countries, and in recent years it has provided support for refugees displaced by events such as the Syrian civil war, the Rohingya emergency, and the ongoing wave of displacement caused by the crisis in Afghanistan<sup>3</sup>.

UNHCR's work encompasses the delivery of immediate aid to people displaced by conflict and persecution, support for countries that are host to refugees, and global advocacy for the rights of all forcibly displaced people<sup>4</sup>. UNHCR's mandate is determined by its Statute<sup>5</sup>, Article 35 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and Article II of the 1967 Protocol<sup>6</sup>. In all of these documents, UNHCR's original core mandate is defined as covering only refugees, defined as 'all persons outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and who, as a result, require international protection<sup>7</sup>', as well as those who are stateless or of disputed nationality. However, as stated above the UN's mandate has steadily expanded from focusing on only those who meet this

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/afghanistan-emergency>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/where-we-work>

<sup>5</sup> Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

<sup>6</sup> 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/centralasia/en/our-mandate>

definition to providing assistance to a wider range of displaced people. For example, internally displaced persons (IDPs), who make up over half of all forcibly displaced people worldwide<sup>8</sup>, do not fall under the original mandate of UNHCR but today are targeted by many UNHCR initiatives and are the subject of UNHCR's dedicated IDP Initiative<sup>9</sup>.

This expansion of UNHCR beyond its original mandate is worthy of attention in the context of one of the most rapidly emerging new causes of displacement: climate change. The ongoing climate crisis necessitates the development of both policies to combat climate change itself, and the development of new international norms and mandates to address its consequences. The climate crisis is inseparably linked to the work of UNHCR, as changing weather patterns provoke shortages of vital resources such as food and water that worsen existing unrest, as well as increasing the instance of devastating natural disasters such as hurricanes and cyclones, all of which contributes to increased displacement<sup>10</sup>.

As such, UNHCR has already begun to take a proactive approach in seeking to respond to the challenges caused by climate change-induced displacement. UNHCR worked to ensure that the voices of refugees and displaced people were represented at the 2022 COP27 summit, with displaced persons from countries such as Sudan and Yemen addressing the conference to the first time, as well as emphasising in its own statements the need for climate action finance to reach those displaced by climate change and the communities that host them<sup>11</sup>. As such, it is likely that the UNHCR's mandate will continue to expand to include supporting and advocating for those displaced by climate change.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR's Initiative on Internal Displacement, 2020-2021

<sup>10</sup> *Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative*, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-refugees-and-displaced-people-need-seats-cop28-table>

# Topic A: Improving Access to Education for Refugees

## Statement of the Problem

Education is a basic human right, enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, the rise in forced displacement around the world has led to large gaps between refugees and their non-refugee peers when it comes to access to education. For non-refugees, education is how one feeds one's curiosity, discovers one's passions, and learns to look after oneself. For refugees, education performs the same functions as well as doing so much more. Education is the surest road to recovering a sense of purpose and dignity after the trauma of displacement as well as being a route to economic self-sufficiency.<sup>12</sup>

While there have been gains in educational enrolment, there are currently around 3.7 million refugees out of school. As such, it is essential that educational enrolment be increased, as UNHCR considers school to be fundamentally protective. It provides children, many of whom will have witnessed or experienced violence, hunger or isolation, with a place of normality and routine. Moreover, it provides a physical barrier to anyone seeking to exploit children—such as people traffickers, criminal gangs or armed groups. Finally, education reduces girls' vulnerability to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and child marriage. According to UNESCO, if all girls were to complete primary school, child marriages would fall by 14%. If all girls were to finish secondary school, it would drop by 64%.<sup>13</sup>

In light of the beneficial and fundamentally protective nature of schooling, it is essential that we improve access to education for refugees!

## History of the Problem

Many children have left their countries of origin due to violence, deprivation and conflict, and education is often a key factor in shaping their decision. For example, 38% of children interviewed

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/closing-the-refugee-education-gap/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

in a UNICEF-REACH survey conducted in Italy in 2017 cited education as the most important factor in their decision. Moreover, in a recent assessment in Greece, 77% of children listed going to school as one of their top priorities.<sup>14</sup> Education is such a priority for refugees not least because children under 18 comprise about half of the global refugee population.<sup>15</sup>

Education is a basic human right and education rights are guaranteed in international instruments, including:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The 1996 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

The 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees with its 1967 Protocol regarding the education rights of refugees.<sup>16</sup>

Although all children have a fundamental right to basic education, in practice the type, quality and duration of schooling offered to asylum-seeking and refugee children is dependent on a plethora of external factors rather than on their educational needs. As such, there are currently around 3.7 million refugees out of school, with large gaps existing between refugees and their non-refugee peers when it comes to access to education.

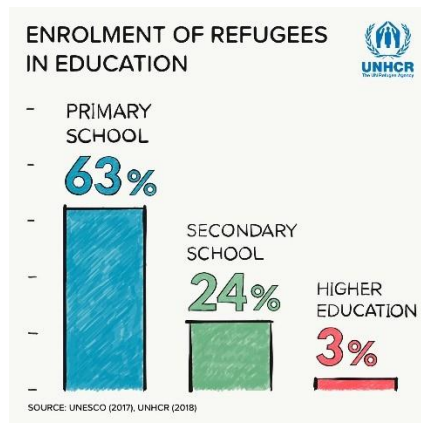
---

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>





At primary level, 63% of refugees are enrolled in school, compared to a global level of 91%.

At secondary level, 24% of refugees are enrolled in school, compared to a global level of 84%.

At higher level, 3% of refugees are enrolled, compared to a global level of 37%.<sup>17</sup>

This represents a small gain in educational enrolment in comparison to previous years. Refugee enrolment at primary level has increased from 61% to 63%, while secondary level enrolment has risen from 23% to 24%. Moreover, enrolment at higher level has increased to 3% following several years stuck at 1%.<sup>18</sup>

The rise reflects efforts by host states, donors, UNHCR staff and partner organisations. A range of countries, including Uganda, Chad, Kenya, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Mexico, have made significant progress in improving access to education for refugees through measures such as: offering additional help to children to catch up on missed schoolwork or to learn a new language, training new teachers and providing more educational materials. Initiatives by host governments were further supported by a partnership between UNHCR and Educate A Child, which implemented education programmes across a dozen countries that resulted in the enrolment of more than 250, 000 children in primary school in 2018.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** Efforts to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted the operation of education institutions around the world through the closure of schools and universities. UNESCO reports that in 2020, over 67.7% (1.18 billion learners) of all those enrolled in education programmes are affected by school closures.<sup>20</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools, universities, technical and vocational training institutes have also affected refugee learners and students, not least on account of the fact that emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic can exacerbate the stigmatisation and exclusion of foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>21</sup>

Governments and schools have adopted a variety of solutions to ensure that learning can continue while having to stay at home, including the use of internet-based materials, online communication platforms and virtual classrooms, and broadcast technologies. There is a risk that refugees may be disadvantaged as they experience uneven access to distance education and online learning opportunities and hardware. In fact, initial indications show that refugee families often lack the hardware needed to have meaningful access to national distance and connected education programmes implemented by governments.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the digital divide is having a profound impact on refugee students.

Moreover, parents around the world have had to assume responsibility for supporting their children's learning. Where refugee parents are not literate in the language of instruction or have themselves had limited education opportunities, this can be especially challenging.

School closures have also disrupted the support services that are provided through schools, such as school meals and psycho-social support. Globally, thousands of refugee children are missing out on school meals on which their families relied, and which were an important defence against food

---

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5f06d92e4>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5ea7eb134>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5f06d92e4>

insecurity.<sup>23</sup> The suspension of school meal programmes could affect the nutrition and health status of refugee children and adolescents.

As schools begin to re-open in some countries, many adaptations have to be made to the way that schools operate to ensure better hygiene and implement physical distancing requirements.

However, schools in areas where refugees live often have poor infrastructure and are located in areas where access to water is not guaranteed and where classrooms are over-crowded.

A further issue, as schools begin to re-open, is the fact that other pandemic responses that included extended school closures have shown that girls are less likely to return to school and are at greater risk of falling behind.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, refugee students are at a particular disadvantage and continued disruption to learning and difficulties accessing services puts the gains made in refugees' access to education at risk. UNHCR has a key role to play in advocating for and ensuring the inclusion of refugees to enable the continuity of learning.

## Current Situation

There are a number of issues affecting the access to education for refugees. Displacement disrupts the education of children on account of the difficulties and dangers that they face in reaching safety, accessing vital resources, acquiring new identity documents and aiding their families.<sup>25</sup>

**Protracted situations:** The refugee experience is of increasing length, with a large number being in exile for longer than 5 years with some up to 30 years and shrinking numbers being able to return home.<sup>26</sup> In 2018, almost four in every five refugees were in protracted situations, such that refugee children can be out of school for years at a time. Some may even go through an entire

---

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5f06d92e4>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5ea7eb134>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20120620181240197>

school cycle, from 5 to 18, in exile. Thus, it is highly difficult for them to re-join formal education.<sup>27</sup> For example, more than a quarter of children interviewed in Italy in 2017 said they never went to school, while one third managed to complete only primary school before starting their journey to Europe. Similarly, a quarter of children interviewed in Serbia, Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia, Hungary and Bulgaria had not completed any formal level of education, while another third completed only primary education prior to their arrival in Europe.<sup>28</sup>

**Stretched resources:** In 2018, 85% of refugees were located in low or middle-income regions with a third being in the lowest-income countries. In these under-resourced regions in which millions of refugees are located, there may not even be a school to attend. Where schools exist, they may already be stretched to breaking point with overflowing classrooms, a lack of teachers, a shortage of basic facilities, and insufficient teaching and learning materials.<sup>29</sup>

**Lack of documentation:** The chaos of displacement leads to many people fleeing their homes without their documents, such as birth certificates, forms of identification, educational records and exam certificates. There is difficulty in them being granted entrance to a local school in a new country without these. For example, despite Ecuadorian efforts to make school enrolment more accessible, a recent survey found that missing documentation was one of the main reasons why refugee children were not in school in the first year.<sup>30</sup>

Even when they have these records, a school in another country will not always accept them.<sup>31</sup> One of the biggest barriers facing foreign trained professionals is the lack of understanding of foreign credentials among employers and regulators.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a5f41fc4.pdf>

**Parallel schooling:** Uncertified parallel systems persist as a temporary response to refugee emergencies. However, these systems are usually of poor quality, far less likely to follow a formal curriculum and result in unrecognised certification. Moreover, these systems reduce a refugee's chance of progressing to formal secondary education.<sup>33</sup> Two examples of such systems are as follows:

An open-air school run by adults who are educated but not trained as teachers, improvising a curriculum.

Teaching of the curriculum of their home country, even though there is no possibility of formal exams or certification.

For example, in Turkey, temporary education centres that are not registered or do not meet the Ministry of National Education's regulatory standards are not accredited. Thus, students in these schools do not receive certificates when they complete their studies, making it difficult to provide proof of their learning achievements.<sup>34</sup>

**Location of refugees:** 60% of refugees live in urban areas, outside of formal camps, which can lead to a number of issues.

Most of the humanitarian sector's models were developed for camp-based settings.

These refugees in urban areas are frequently in marginalised and underserved neighbourhoods, thereby straining existing service delivery infrastructure.

Unlike in camps, refugee families may not be aware of available education options.

Urban refugees often face distinct barriers to education stemming from their refugee status, including discrimination and xenophobia amongst the host population.<sup>35</sup>

**Pre-Primary Schooling:** Very few refugee children participate in pre-primary programmes even though the benefits are long-established, with a wealth of evidence demonstrating how much they

---

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_Education\\_Uprooted.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Education_Uprooted.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/05/11/innovations-for-improving-access-to-and-quality-of-education-for-urban-refugees/>

helped children to develop socially and emotionally. If every refugee child could spend their early years playing in a safe place and being cared for, they would reap benefits for a lifetime.<sup>36</sup>

**Growing gap between primary and secondary enrolment:** Secondary education provides a safe space for personal development and positive social networks for adolescents whose transition to adulthood has been disrupted by instability and violence. However, the contrast between primary and secondary enrolment is stark with 63% of refugees being enrolled in school at the primary level, while only 24% are enrolled at the secondary level. This may be attributable to a number of factors:

Secondary education is generally more costly than primary.

Where resources are constrained, the common practice has been to give priority to supporting primary education, resulting in chronic neglect of secondary education services.<sup>37</sup>

Subject learning at the secondary level is more advanced, with some subjects requiring better facilities and learning materials.

There is a lack of secondary schools in many refugee-hosting areas. For example, in Kakuma refugee camp, in Northern Kenya, there are only 7 secondary schools in the region, compared to 26 primary schools. Where these schools do exist, getting into them can already be a challenge for local adolescents without the addition of hundreds or thousands of new arrivals.<sup>38</sup>

Secondary studies demand better qualified teachers.<sup>39</sup>

Since higher-paying jobs that require higher levels of education are often not available to individuals who carry a refugee status, families often do not see the value or payoff of higher education.

Lack of funding in secondary schools to address barriers to education.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a5f41fc4.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/advancing-access-education-refugees>

Delayed enrolment, low participation rates, and poor quality at upper primary levels lead to a low number of children successfully passing primary examinations, making many ineligible to continue to secondary school.<sup>41</sup>

**Higher education crisis:** The effect of low enrolment rates at secondary level has led to refugee enrolment in higher education being at very low levels. In 2018, only 3% of refugee adolescents were enrolled in university or on a technical or vocational course. There are some recurring barriers keeping refugees from progressing to higher education:

Education certification is often lost or may not be recognised for entry into an institution in another country.

Advanced courses require advanced language skills, which refugees may not possess.

The high cost of tertiary education can deter or exclude many students, particular where refugees are classified as international students and required to pay the higher international student rates.<sup>42</sup>

**Pressure to earn:** Refugee adolescents come under great pressure to support their households, especially as some are under pressure to send money back home to support their families. Due to exploitative labour practices and violations of the right to work, most families need older children to work rather than go to school.<sup>43</sup> Reports indicate that child labour is on the rise among Syrian refugee children and the children in host communities.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, collecting water or fuel, taking care of younger siblings or older relatives or carrying out household chores are often seen as more valuable than any investment in education. In this regard, girls are often at an even greater disadvantage in terms of ‘opportunity costs’, the perceived losses in terms of income and domestic duties.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a5f41fc4.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/advancing-access-education-refugees>

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_Education\\_Uprooted.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Education_Uprooted.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

**Policy Issues:** According to Professor Coomans, while international document standards exist, what is still missing is ensuring the educational right of asylum seekers and irregular or undocumented refugees. Thus, what is required is to translate these international document standards, such that they can be integrated into domestic legislation, policies and practices.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, even if national policies do exist, such policies are rarely fully implemented, largely due to a lack of clear operating procedures and poor information dissemination channels.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the existence of conflicting policies can undermine progress. For example, over the past 2 years Greece has set up official kindergartens and increased the number of special reception classes in primary and secondary school to integrate refugee children into state-run schools on the mainland. On the islands, by contrast, where thousands of refugees reside in often overcrowded conditions in 5 reception centres, little progress has been made in enrolment.<sup>48</sup>

**Language:** There are often limited opportunities for non-native speakers to acquire the host-country language.<sup>49</sup> This is particularly problematic, given that about two thirds of refugees live in areas where none of the official languages is the official language in their country of origin.<sup>50</sup>

**Legal Status Issues:** There is a significant dependency of any available opportunities on legal status, such that asylum seekers who have not yet been granted legal status are unable to access them.<sup>51</sup> For example, only 10 European Union Member States recognise the right of undocumented migrant children to enter the school system, and 5 explicitly exclude them from free schooling.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/fulfilling-right-education-refugees-and-undocumented-migrants>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/05/11/innovations-for-improving-access-to-and-quality-of-education-for-urban-refugees/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_Education\\_Uprooted.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Education_Uprooted.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>

<sup>52</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_Education\\_Uprooted.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Education_Uprooted.pdf)



Moreover, as of 2018, around 50% of refugee-hosting countries did not allow refugees to work. Thus, even refugees who have overcome all odds to access and complete their education find themselves back in a state of limbo, unable to use their skills.<sup>53</sup>

**Training and Guidance:** There is often insufficient training and guidance for teachers to better address the educational needs of refugee and asylum-seeker students in mainstream classrooms.<sup>54</sup> For instance, there is often a lack of training and teaching resources to educate vulnerable individuals, including those suffering from trauma.<sup>55</sup>

**Accountability:** While international accountability mechanisms exist either through State reporting or dialogue within the UN system or at UNESCO level, there is a gap in terms of what states have actually been doing. A key reason is that in many cases or countries education or education rights are not seen as human rights, such that States do not feel the need to justify what they have done or have failed to do. Thus, accountability domestically or internationally is poor.

Through State-level reports, governments can be held accountable for providing education. Moreover, civil society can prepare shadow reports and make them available to supervisory bodies, thereby identifying key problems that the state has failed to address.<sup>56</sup>

**Lack of female teachers:** A vital ingredient in improving the number of girls attending school is increasing the number of female teachers. This is due to the fact that parents in some conservative communities will not allow their daughters to be taught by a man. Female teachers also help girls to feel more comfortable in the classroom, especially should they need to report incidents of sexual harassment or abuse, and can inspire and support girls to complete their studies.

---

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a5f41fc4.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/fulfilling-right-education-refugees-and-undocumented-migrants>

However, the number of female teachers in schools teaching refugees decreases between pre-primary and secondary education. For example, in Chad, 98% of teachers in pre-primary are female, but at secondary school this figure drops drastically to only 7%.<sup>57</sup>

**Challenges and gaps in education statistics:** Education statistics are essential for assessing the baseline situation with regards to refugee children’s school enrolment and effecting change through an evidence-based approach. While in some countries education assessments have been conducted in coordination with national educational authorities, this is often an ad-hoc effort that is yet to be linked to national education management information systems. For example, based on a European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights report, only 10 out of 28 EU Member States capture migration status in education statistics.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, data is often not comparable across countries due to the variety of indicators used, such as asylum-seekers, refugees, non-nationals, and not speaking the language of instruction, as well as the different timeframes for the data collection.

| EU Member State | (Proxy) Indicator used by national authorities to report school enrolment |
|-----------------|---|
| Austria         | Only asylum-seekers   |
| Bulgaria        | Asylum-seekers and refugees   |
| Germany         | All persons with migration background <sup>27</sup>                       |
| Denmark         | Only refugees   |
| Greece          | All non-Greek citizens <sup>28</sup>                                      |
| Italy           | All non-Italian students (by nationality) regardless of residence status  |
| The Netherlands | Only asylum-seekers   |
| Poland          | Asylum-seekers and refugees (percentages only)                            |
| Slovakia        | Only accompanied asylum-seekers   |
| France          | Non-French speaking children  |

Source: EU FRA

Finally, data on refugee children in pre-primary (3–5 years) and upper secondary education (15+ years) is largely missing, particularly in countries where these age groups are not covered by national legislation on compulsory education.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

**Stereotypes and judgement:** Stereotypes and judgements based on perceptions at school may lead to discrimination, prejudice and bullying as refugees are seen as different. Moreover, teachers are not always sufficiently equipped to promote multiculturalism and openness to diversity.<sup>60</sup>

## Relevant UN Actions

In light of its mandate to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people, UNHCR has engaged in a variety of actions to improve access to education for refugees.

**Technical assistance to governments:** UNHCR has provided guidance and technical assistance to national authorities. For example, UNICEF and UNHCR provided guidance to national authorities in Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia to address practical barriers and develop national action plans to integrate refugee children in public schools, which resulted in over 12,000 children being enrolled in public schools in South Eastern Europe in 2018.<sup>61</sup>

**Non-formal education and after-school support:** UNHCR has aided the provision of non-formal education and after-school support for refugees facilitating personal development and inclusion in the local community. For example, in 2018, UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM supported the provision of non-formal education, including homework support and psychosocial support for over 16,200 children enrolled in public schools in Greece, Italy, Serbia, Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>62</sup>

**Capacity-building for education professionals:** One instance of UNCHR support capacity-building activities is in Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, where UNICEF and UNHCR supported capacity-building activities for some 4,400 formal and nonformal education professionals in 2017

---

<sup>60</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

and 2018. Moreover, UNHCR has developed teacher training materials on the topic of refugees, asylum and migration, currently available in French, English and Dutch, which include professional guidance on dealing with symptoms of stress and trauma.<sup>63</sup>

**Awareness raising and sensitisation of local communities:** UNHCR has fostered inclusion of refugees in the local community through awareness raising and sensitisation of the local communities. For example, in Cyprus, Germany, Greece and Serbia, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and other NGOs have worked on sensitizing local communities on the importance of education for refugee and migrant children.<sup>64</sup>

**Education supplies:** For example, in Greece and Serbia, UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM have provided refugees with educational materials and supplies. In Serbia, UNHCR also provided furniture and equipment to four schools benefitting both local and refugee children.<sup>65</sup>

**Transportation:** One instance of UNHCR providing transportation for refugees is when, in 2017 and 2018, IOM and UNHCR provided school transportation for children from accommodation facilities to public schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece and Serbia.<sup>66</sup>

## Proposed Solutions

Providing refugees with a proper curriculum, school certification and ample opportunities is the pathway to progressing to secondary and higher education, onward to employment. The UNHCR's ambition over the next decade, as outlined in the Refugee Education 2030 strategy, is for refugees to achieve parity with their non-refugee peers in pre-primary, primary and secondary education and to boost their enrolment in higher education to 15%.<sup>67</sup> Some of the following solutions could

---

<sup>63</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/closing-the-refugee-education-gap/>

be implemented, though this set of proposed solutions is by no means exhaustive, and it might even be in the policy of certain nations to oppose them.

**Maximising Education with Limited Resources:** There are a number of methods that could be implemented to maximise education with limited resources. One such example is that of Jordan, which created ‘shifts’ in schools, where local children would attend class in the morning and Syrian children in the afternoon, ensuring that as large a number of students as possible were in attendance.<sup>68</sup>

**Teaching Support:** Additional support is essential in improving access to education for refugees. Teaching support could be made available through teaching assistants speaking the refugee children’s language. Thus, these individuals could serve as a liaison between schools and parents as well as intercultural mediators and facilitators of integration.<sup>69</sup> Additional tutoring after school hours would also be helpful in enabling refugee children to gain the support that they need.

There have also been initiatives to invest in teacher coaching and mentoring rather than in traditional front-ended (pre-service) teacher training. For example, Teachers 4 Teachers, a collaboration of Teachers College, Columbia University and Finn Church Aid, in partnership with UNHCR and the Lutheran World Federation, has implemented a model that focuses on in-service mobile mentoring coupled with peer-to-peer coaching and in-service training in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya.<sup>70</sup>

**Tracking Non-Formal Education Credentials:** Technology has been utilised in tracking non-formal education credentials that will help refugees access higher education and livelihoods, as the lack of standardised certification for non-formal education across countries has been a barrier for

---

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/advancing-access-education-refugees>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/05/11/innovations-for-improving-access-to-and-quality-of-education-for-urban-refugees/>

refugees as they attempt to access higher education and jobs. For example, two graduate students at Columbia's School for International and Public Affairs have created A4Ed, which leverages mobile and blockchain technology to provide a platform to track, store and verify refugees' non-formal learning achievements and skill development. This creates a 'digital backpack' of classes, workshops, internships and skills, which refugees can present to higher educational institutions, scholarship committees and employers.<sup>71</sup>

**Accelerated Education Programmes:** The realities of displacement have led to refugee children missing out on significant periods of schooling. Moreover, many refugee children come from countries where education was already difficult to access.

Accelerated education programmes are flexible, age appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aim to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and adolescents. The programmes are designed to help these children and adolescents enter or re-enter the standard school system at the correct level for their age and ability.<sup>72</sup> For example, in Jordan, a modified curriculum was developed to reach children who had been out of school for years. Teachers were trained to implement the program and new classrooms were built dedicated to the program.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, in Uganda, 23,000 over-age learners who were previously out of school are now participating in primary education on account of accelerated education programmes.<sup>74</sup>

**Connected Learning Programmes:** Connected learning programmes aid refugees in accessing higher education, particularly from remote areas. The Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium encourages universities to provide online education in contexts of conflict and displacement. Thus,

---

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/05/11/innovations-for-improving-access-to-and-quality-of-education-for-urban-refugees/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/advancing-access-education-refugees>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

refugee students are able to complete university degrees by following courses and interacting with their professors and fellow students online.<sup>75</sup>

**Language Programmes:** Language programmes aid refugee children in learning the language of the new country that they are in. For example, Turkey, which hosts 1 million refugee children, has implemented a Turkish-language programme to prepare refugee children for the transition from unofficial temporary schools to Turkish schools.<sup>76</sup>

Specialised textbooks have also been helpful in teaching the national language to refugee and asylum-seeking children.<sup>77</sup>

**Financial Support:** Cash transfers give families the ability to prioritise what they need and reduce the likelihood of their turning to child labour and forced marriages as ways of finding an income. Cash transfers have improved access, attendance and participation in a range of countries, including Kenya, Turkey, Chad and Egypt. For example, in Egypt, a project implemented by Catholic Relief Services, where cash transfers were linked to proof of enrolment and attendance with no restrictions on how the money is spent, has helped improve refugee children's school attendance, particularly at secondary level.<sup>78</sup>

Scholarships also aid refugees in overcoming financial barriers to accessing education.

Programmes, such as DAFI, offer scholarships to undergraduate refugee students that cover a wide range of costs, including tuition fees, study materials, food, transport and accommodation.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

There are a number of other measures that could be implemented to provide financial support to refugees in their efforts to access education:

Home fees and student finance being available for those with discretionary leave to remain.<sup>80</sup>

Universities granting more fee waivers for asylum seekers, an initiative, which some universities in the United Kingdom have already implemented.<sup>81</sup>

Direct financial support being provided for the cost of tuition, exam fees, uniforms, school supplies, lunches and/or transport.<sup>82</sup>

**Adequate Legislation:** Legislation should be adjusted to ensure that it does not prevent refugee children and adolescents from attending school and university courses. For example, Ecuador has passed legislation to make school enrolment more accessible for Venezuelan refugee children and adolescents, even where they do not have the required documentation.<sup>83</sup>

## Questions a Resolution Must Answer

- How can host countries provide more educational opportunities for refugee populations? How can they be helped to achieve this?
- What resources or facilities would you prioritise?
- What can universities, schools and individual professors or teachers do to support access to education for refugees?
- How could online learning be used to help refugees access education, particularly in remote areas?
- How can families be incentivised to ensure that their children get a full education when the costs of lost income are high?
- How can refugee families be better involved in school life?

There may be other issues that a good resolution should address, and it is encouraged that these issues be included.

---

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20120620181240197>

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20120620181240197>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f1767>

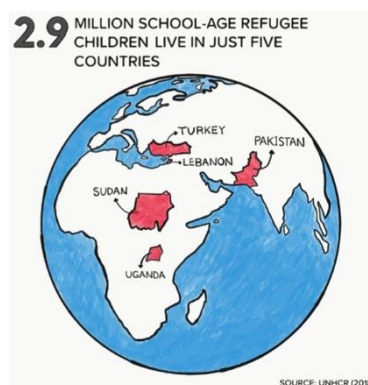


## Bloc Positions

Many high-income countries continue to prioritise policies that deter and prevent individuals from seeking asylum. As such, the onus has been placed on neighbouring countries to protect people fleeing for their lives,<sup>84</sup> and low- and middle-income countries are hosting far more refugees than high-income countries.

84% of refugees live in developing countries, including 6.7 million in the least developed ones.<sup>85</sup> This has led to these regions being host to high concentrations of refugee children. These regions struggle to provide quality education for their own populations, let alone the sudden influx of new arrivals. As such, there are particular countries and regions that are more likely to require support in improving access to education for refugees.

Turkey is the country with the largest refugee population, hosting 3.5 million at the end of 2017. Lebanon and Jordan host the highest number relative to population size. In Lebanon, there are 164 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, which equates to one in six people. When the Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the UNRWA are included in figures, refugees form a quarter of the population of Lebanon. In terms of total numbers in 2017, Pakistan and Uganda had the next highest number, hosting 1.4 million refugees each.<sup>86</sup>



## Suggestions for Further Research

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/mena-countries-in-the-middle-east-have-the-highest-proportion-of-refugees-in-the-world/>

The resource that proved the most useful was the website of the UNHCR itself, as it provided an insight into the intricacies of the current situation and measures that UNHCR has undertaken in the past in order to mitigate these issues. The following resources were particularly helpful and insightful.

<https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/09/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-9.pdf>

UNHCR's report, *Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis*, was particularly helpful in illustrating and providing statistics on the current situation. Moreover, this report concisely states what actions particular stakeholders could take. I found this to be the most helpful resource of those that I utilised and would highly recommend it as a first port of call!

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e9bf50615.html>

UNHCR's report, *Improving Access to Education for Asylum-Seeker, Refugee Children and Adolescents in Central Europe*, outlines the vast multitude of challenges currently faced in seeking to improve access to education for refugees.

[https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press\\_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/access-to-education-for-refugee-children.pdf)

This factsheet, jointly produced by UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM, helpfully illustrates the measures that have been implemented in the past in order to improve access to education for refugees. In particular, it helpfully illustrates the role of the United Nations in these endeavours.

<https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/advancing-access-education-refugees>

This website detailed a conversation between resource practitioners investigating ways in which the right to education can be secured for those who have been forced from their homes and communities. It proved useful in providing an insight into a number of viewpoints on the current issues faced by refugees and how these issues could be mitigated.

## Topic B: Climate Change and Displacement

### Statement of the Problem

The Horn of Africa region is experiencing a deepening food crisis, as a result of an extended drought. The seasonal rains upon which the region is reliant have failed for the sixth consecutive year in a row<sup>87</sup>, meaning that there is no relief in sight for the millions affected by food insecurity in the region. The situation is particularly severe in Somalia and Ethiopia, where the drought has resulted in massive levels of displacement and now threatens already fragile political stability. A report by UNHCR in February 2023 found that the drought had resulted in 3.3 million people being made refugees or internally displaced as a result<sup>88</sup>. 66 million people are estimated to have experienced food insecurity across eastern Africa in 2022<sup>89</sup>, a rise of 12 million year-on-year from 2021. The region is already host to at least 4.67 million refugees and 21.64 million internally displaced persons, a figure which is only likely to increase<sup>90</sup>.

The region is also no stranger to conflict and unrest arising from a combination of resource scarcity, long-standing ethnic tensions, and Islamist insurgency from groups such as Somalia's Al-Shabaab. Between November 2020 and November 2022 war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia created a widespread humanitarian crisis whose impact is nowhere close to being fully addressed, while Somalia suffers from long-term political instability, with Al-Shabaab and other local militias

---

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/horn-africa-drought-enters-sixth-failed-rainy-season-unhcr-calls-urgent-assistance#:~:text=As%20the%20Horn%20of%20Africa,UNHCR%20calls%20for%20urgent%20assistance>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> *Food Security, Vulnerability and Livelihoods Across Eastern Africa: Trends and Drivers 2015-2022*. World Food Programme, March 2023, p.2

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p12.

having control over large swathes of central and southern Somalia as well as considerable presence in the north of the country<sup>91</sup>. Besides the crises of hunger and displacement, commentators have warned that there is an increasing risk of conflict breaking out in one or both of the countries as their governments struggle to mount an adequate response to all of the challenges they concurrently face.

## History of the Problem

**Climate Change:** While the Earth has always endured natural climate change variability, the increase in greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere from industrial processes has enhanced the natural greenhouse effect, which causes greenhouse gases to form a blanket around the Earth inhibiting the sun's heat from leaving the outer atmosphere. Thus, this increase in greenhouse gases is causing additional warming of the Earth's surface and atmosphere.

A direct consequence of this is sea level rise, due to thermal expansion of oceans and the melting of ice sheets as global surface temperatures increase. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects a rise in the global average surface temperature by 1.4 to 5.8°C from 1990 to 2100, which will result in a global mean sea level rise of an average of 5mm per year over the next 100 years.<sup>92</sup> Other impacts of climate change include increased droughts, desertification, erosion, salt-water intrusion and more frequent occurrence of extreme weather events. These adverse conditions lead to further risks, such as droughts killing crops, salt-water intrusion rendering species of freshwater fish extinct and wildfires obliterating rainforest.<sup>93</sup> Thus, human-induced climate change will have deleterious effects on ecosystems, socio-economic systems and human welfare.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabaab>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.safecom.org.au/foe-climate-guide.htm>

<sup>93</sup> <https://therevelator.org/climate-refugees-legal/>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.safecom.org.au/foe-climate-guide.htm>

**Climate Change and Displacement:** The Atlas of Environmental Migration, which gives examples dating as far back as 45,000 years ago, demonstrates that environmental changes and natural disasters have played a role in how the population is distributed on our planet throughout history.<sup>95</sup> While migration has been a fixture throughout history, it is highly likely that undesirable environmental changes directly created by, or amplified by, climate change will extensively change the patterns of human settlement by leading to displacement. Climate change intensifies the risk of sudden-onset natural hazards, while slower-onset impacts, such as sea-level rise, erosion and desertification, may lead to a more gradual deterioration of physical conditions that renders areas uninhabitable.

In 2019, nearly 2,000 disasters triggered 24.9 million new internal displacements across 140 countries and territories. This is the highest figure recorded since 2012 and three times the number of displacements caused by conflict and violence. Most of the disaster displacements were the result of tropical storms and monsoon rain in South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, with four countries accounting for more than 17 million new internal displacements due to disaster: India, the Philippines, Bangladesh and China.<sup>96</sup> Whilst the majority of displacement in the context of environmental and climate change occurs within the borders of countries, some people are forced to move abroad, though global data on such cross-border movement is limited.<sup>97</sup>

An example of a migratory crisis linked to climate change is the Central American mass migration to the United States. Recent studies and reports on the issue have highlighted climate change as a key factor in this migratory crisis. Average temperatures in Central America have increased by 0.5°C since 1950 and are predicted to rise another 1–2°C before 2050. Furthermore, the number of storms, floods and droughts in the region continue to rise and the US Agency for International

---

<sup>95</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/07/1043551>

<sup>96</sup> [https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental\\_migration](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental_migration)

<sup>97</sup> [https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental\\_migration](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental_migration)

Development predict that rainfall will decrease. A report by The Guardian shows that El Salvador is projected to lose 10–28% of its coastline before the end of the century.<sup>98</sup>

Another instance of climate change contributing to conflict and displacement is during the conflict in Darfur. According to former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the ethnic and religious violence in Darfur can be attributed to global warming, as ‘the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change’.<sup>99</sup>

**Managing Cross-Border Climate Displacement:** Roundtables, conferences and state-led initiatives have resulted in commitments by countries to prevent and address cross-border climate displacement.

- In 2015, 109 governmental delegations endorsed the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, which identifies tools to aid states in preventing, preparing for and addressing ‘protection needs of people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and climate change’. In 2016, The Platform on Disaster Displacement was launched to ensure implementation of this Protection Agenda. States are already utilising these tools, such as humanitarian visas.<sup>100</sup>
- The signatories to the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change requested that the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change develop recommendations for addressing people displaced by climate change.
- The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted in December 2018 called on countries to make plans to prevent the need for climate-caused relocation and support those forced to relocate. It recognised that ‘climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements’.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.climateforesight.eu/migrations/environmental-migrants-up-to-1-billion-by-2050/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://en.reset.org/knowledge/environmental-refugees---how-climate-change-affects-peoples-lives>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/why-unhcr-is-taking-action-on-climate-change-displacement/>

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-climate-crisis-migration-and-refugees/>

However, these agreements are neither legally binding nor sufficiently developed to support climate migrants, particularly those from South Asia, Central America and Northwest Africa.

**Landmark Ruling:** On 7<sup>th</sup> January 2020, the UN Human Rights Committee recognised for the first time that forcibly returning a person to a place where their life would be at risk due to the adverse effects of climate change may violate the right to life under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In 2013, Ioane Teitiota, a national of Kiribati, applied for refugee status in New Zealand on the basis that the risks to his life posed by climate change forced him to leave Kiribati. The Immigration and Protection Tribunal rejected his application and this decision was upheld on appeal to the High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court of New Zealand. Thus, in 2015, Mr Teitiota was deported with his wife and children to Kiribati.<sup>102</sup> Mr Teitiota then filed a communication with the Human Rights Committee claiming that New Zealand violated his right to life by forcibly returning him to Kiribati. He argued that the rise in sea level and other effects of climate change, such as environmental degradation and contamination of the freshwater supply, had rendered Kiribati uninhabitable.

Although expressly recognising that both sudden-onset and slow-onset events caused by climate change create a real risk that Kiribati may become entirely submerged, the Human Rights Committee determine that New Zealand's courts had not violated Mr Teitiota's right to life as sufficient protection measures had been put in place despite the serious situation in Kiribati.<sup>103</sup>

While Mr Teitiota's claim was unsuccessful, the ruling has been considered a landmark, as the Human Rights Committee accepted that states have an obligation not to forcibly return individuals

---

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25482&LangID=E>

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25482&LangID=E>

to places where climate change poses a real risk to their right to life. This represents a significant development in the protection of ‘climate refugees’ under international human rights law.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/teitiota-v-new-zealand-a-step-forward-in-the-protection-of-climate-refugees-under-international-human-rights-law/>



## Current Situation

The ongoing drought, estimated to be the worst in 40 years, has been exacerbated by the effects of climate change giving rise to changing weather patterns. African countries are on the frontline of the effects of global heating, with average temperature rises on the continent increasing faster than the global average<sup>105</sup>. Both Somalia and Ethiopia are among the countries considered the most vulnerable to the effects of the climate change, and one cannot consider solutions to their respective crises without placing the ongoing food insecurity in this context<sup>106</sup>. In order to continue providing humanitarian support as the number of those displaced by climate change increases, there is a need for the work of UNHCR to become more closely integrated with the global climate change response. There is a need for deeper integration of support for climate-displaced people into UNHCR's mandate, potentially incorporating the use of funds established to address the impact of climate change such as the Loss & Damages fund established at COP27 into efforts to support displaced people<sup>107</sup>.

## Climate change and displacement worldwide

The impact of natural disasters and the more gradual effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels, longer and harsher droughts and floods, can create new displaced populations and pose challenges for existing ones.

**Legal issues:** The term 'climate refugee' is often used in the media and other discussions when referring to climate change and the ensuing displacement. However, this term does not actually exist in international law. According to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who has crossed an international border 'owing to well-founded fear of being

---

<sup>105</sup> *Africa Regional Fact Sheet*, International Governmental Panel on Climate Change 6<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report, p1.

<sup>106</sup> *Emergency Watchlist 2023*. International Rescue Committee, p28-29, 2023

<sup>107</sup>

persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’.

Individuals who flee across borders due to climate change or natural disasters generally do not qualify as refugees, particularly as environmental factors are not specifically cited in the definition. Moreover, the environment cannot personally persecute people or communities, as is required under the definition. While there are certain demographic groups, such as working class and poorer communities, that are more prone to being environmentally displaced, nature is arbitrary.<sup>108</sup> As such, the term ‘climate refugee’ itself is not endorsed by UNHCR and it is considered more accurate to refer to them as individuals displaced in the context of disaster and climate change.<sup>109</sup>

There may be situations relating to climate change where the refugee criteria do apply, given that natural disasters are known to destabilise already shaky states of peace, triggering wars or other violent conflicts. Where people are displaced as a result of disasters or climate-related factors that are interlinked with conflict or persecution, the 1951 Refugee Convention is likely to apply. However, legal advocates argue that waiting for those forced into precarious situations by climate change to technically qualify for refugee status is unsatisfactory, particularly as it is clear that climate displacement and climate disasters are happening now.<sup>110</sup>

In light of this protection gap, there have been suggestions to open up the 1951 Refugee Convention by defining a new category of refugees for climate change related reasons. However, a number of issues have been identified in regard to this suggestion:

- Opening up the 1951 Refugee Convention could weaken the status of the term ‘refugee’, thereby harming individuals who already qualify for protection on account of persecution or

---

<sup>108</sup> <https://therevelator.org/climate-refugees-legal/>

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

<sup>110</sup> <https://grist.org/article/climate-refugee-number-definition/>

ongoing conflicts.<sup>111</sup> Dina Ionesco, Head of Migration, Environment and Climate Change at the UN, has argued that utilising the term ‘refugee’ fails to recognise that this migration is not necessarily forced and could weaken the refugee status of those who are in need of protection on account of war or persecution.

- Introducing a new category could lead to the exclusion of people who are in need to of protection, especially the poorest migrants, who move on account of a number of factors and would be unable to prove the link between their migration and climate change.<sup>112</sup>
- Creating a new refugee status would likely be a lengthy political process.
- A key challenge in legislating protection for ‘climate refugees’ lies in the difficulty of defining the term, as the notion of displacement as a result of climate change is a comparatively recent concept.<sup>113</sup>
- Dina Ionesco, Head of Migration, Environment and Climate Change at the UN, has argued that a special refugee status could detract from discussions of preventative measures and environmental solutions that would mean people would not have to leave their homes in the first place.<sup>114</sup>

In light of these issues, there have been suggestions of utilising the term ‘migrant’. Dina Ionesco, Head of Migration, Environment and Climate Change at the UN, suggested that these displaced individuals should be categorised as ‘climate migrants’.<sup>115</sup> The distinction between a refugee and a migrant is a significant one, as, in current refugee law, migrants are less entitled to legal assistance on account of their move being voluntary. Thus, the term ‘migrant’ does not account for the fact that, rather than moving voluntarily, individuals are often fleeing for their lives, having been in a vulnerable and dangerous state trapped in worsening environmental conditions.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/06/lets-talk-about-climate-migrants-not-climate-refugees/>

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/06/lets-talk-about-climate-migrants-not-climate-refugees/>

<sup>113</sup> <https://helprefugees.org/news/the-plight-and-rise-of-climate-refugees/>

<sup>114</sup> <https://helprefugees.org/news/the-plight-and-rise-of-climate-refugees/>

<sup>115</sup> <https://therevelator.org/climate-refugees-legal/>

<sup>116</sup> <https://helprefugees.org/news/the-plight-and-rise-of-climate-refugees/>

Those who are forced to flee their homes on account of environmental issues are in a very similar position to those who are forced to flee due to persecution, as both face danger and destitution. The experience of those who migrate voluntarily is often vastly different, particularly those who leave their home country to pursue careers or join a partner or family member.<sup>117</sup> In fact, Professor Hans van Ginkel, Rector of the United Nations University, emphasised that environment-related refugees must be distinguished from economic migrants, who depart voluntarily to find a better life but may never return home.<sup>118</sup> As such, the term ‘migrant’ is often considered to not be appropriate.

Regardless of which option is selected, the fact that a legal framework to account for climate change as a driver of migration has yet to be created has delayed the very necessary protection of displaced individuals.

**Disproportionate effect on poorer countries:** The effects of climate change will likely hit the poorest nations most, especially as almost two billion people in the world today depend on fragile ecosystems in arid and semi-arid areas and 90% of them live in the developing world.<sup>119</sup>

The report, *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*, predicts that the displacement on account of climate change will likely involve the poorest people from the poorest countries moving in large numbers from rural regions to increasingly overburdened urban areas, with a high likelihood of major disruption and instability.<sup>120</sup> According to Oxfam, low- and lower-middle income nations, such as India, are over four times more likely to be affected by climate-fuelled displacement than high-income countries, such as Spain or the US.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> <https://therevelator.org/climate-refugees-legal/>

<sup>118</sup> <https://en.reset.org/knowledge/environmental-refugees---how-climate-change-affects-peoples-lives>

<sup>119</sup> <https://en.reset.org/knowledge/environmental-refugees---how-climate-change-affects-peoples-lives>

<sup>120</sup> <https://time.com/5206716/world-bank-climate-change-internal-migration/>

<sup>121</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

This is particularly problematic in light of the fact that the richest of the global population account for a significant portion of emissions, while poorer nations are paying the price in the form of climate transformations and resources scarcity. According to Oxfam, the poorest 50% of the global population emit only 10% of emissions whilst the richest 10% are responsible for 50% of emissions.<sup>122</sup>

In light of these inequalities, Maxine Burtkett, professor of law at the University of Hawaii and global fellow at the Wilson Center advocated the idea of climate reparations, the transfer of resources from wealthy countries to developing countries to compensate them for climate harm. However, since this suggestion was first made, there has been very little meaningful action to rectify these inequalities.<sup>123</sup>

**Internal displacement:** Most climate change displacement is internal, with those affected remaining within their national borders. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, there were 18.8 million new disaster-related internal displacements recorded in 2017.<sup>124</sup> When migration is internal, individuals are moving under the responsibility of their own state, do not cross borders and are not seeking protection from a third country or at the international level.

The fact that the majority of climate change displacement is internal is unaddressed by the recent Global Compact on Refugees, which focuses exclusively on cross-border movement.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the Refugee Convention applies only to people displaced across borders.<sup>126</sup>

**Interplay with other factors:** Climate change can add to and worsen the threats that force people to flee. According to Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘forced

---

<sup>122</sup> <https://helprefugees.org/news/the-plight-and-rise-of-climate-refugees/>

<sup>123</sup> <https://grist.org/article/climate-refugee-number-definition/>

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

<sup>125</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/20/621782275/the-refugees-that-the-world-barely-pays-attention-to>

<sup>126</sup> [https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/Factsheet\\_Climate%20change\\_Apr2019.pdf](https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/Factsheet_Climate%20change_Apr2019.pdf)

displacement across borders can stem from the interaction between climate change and disasters with conflict and violence'.<sup>127</sup> For example, flooding in Somalia in 2019 added to the Al-Shabab-related violence plaguing the country, which might be the final straw for already vulnerable communities.<sup>128</sup>

The interplay between climate, conflict, poverty and persecution greatly increases the complexity of refugee emergencies and confuses analysts of how best to tackle either.

**'Safe and dignified' return:** Climate change can affect the concept of 'safe and dignified' return, thereby changing the idea of what a durable solution is. Natural and manmade disasters or competition for land and/or resources can make returning home a practical impossibility. Thus, many assumptions that underpin the solutions paradigm in regard to refugees and migration need to be rethought.<sup>129</sup>

**Ad hoc approach:** While governments, UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations are responding to the growing crisis, this is occurring in ad hoc, reactive ways. Organisations are addressing these issues from a crisis management approach, due to limited budgets, a constant rotation of staff and the sheer scale of existing displacement crises. However, there should be a shift from a crisis management approach toward a risk management approach, thereby working towards building the infrastructure, institutions and conceptual approaches required to respond effectively in the long term.

One of the roles UNHCR could play is to aid in coordinating the response and ensuring the international community is being forward-thinking in creating frameworks and approaches to deal with climate change displacement.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2019/10/5da5e18c4/climate-change-and-displacement.html>

<sup>128</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

<sup>130</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/why-unhcr-is-taking-action-on-climate-change-displacement/>

**Lack of political will or incentive:** While there has been increasing global resolve to combat climate change, most nations lack the political will or incentive to develop a plan to protect refugees impacted by climate change, particularly if the issue does not appear to have a direct effect on their country and especially given the already high numbers of refugees created by war, conflict and terrorism.

Moreover, the emerging trend of nationalist and protectionist rhetoric and policies in many wealthy, industrialised nations, as well as the accompanying lack of empathy, would suggest that initiatives to protect these vulnerable populations are not on the horizon.<sup>131</sup> This trend is more likely to lead to a limiting of refugee protections rather than an expansion. According to Erol Yayboke, a development expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies: ‘To get any progressive international policy, much less hard law, is almost impossible in today’s climate... We’re not going to get any kind of binding convention on displaced people due to climate change’.<sup>132</sup>

**Gender issues:** Climate change induced migration is likely to exacerbate existing issues related to gender, as women and girls are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change impacting education, maternal health and gender-based violence.

- In cases of climate change disasters, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school. For instance, in cases of drought, women and girls are often in charge of water collection. In Africa, it is estimated that 17 million women and girls collect water each day.
- 60% of all preventable maternal deaths take place in settings of conflict, displacement or natural disasters, as women and adolescent girls cannot access critical health care. This is likely to be exacerbated in the case of climate change induced migration.

---

<sup>131</sup> [https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge\\_detail/protecting-climate-refugees-is-crucial-for-the-future/](https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/protecting-climate-refugees-is-crucial-for-the-future/)

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/20/621782275/the-refugees-that-the-world-barely-pays-attention-to>

- There is clear evidence that indicates an increase in sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls both during and after disasters. This is also likely to be exacerbated in the case of climate change induced migration.<sup>133</sup>

**Simultaneous domestic and international challenges:** Some countries will need to be equipped to deal with both domestic and foreign environmental migrants. One example of such a country is India. According to Dr Hefin Jones from Cardiff University, it is estimate that the country itself will have approximately 30 million environmental migrants within 50 years, as the average temperature will increase by 3 to 5°C by 2100. Meanwhile, the current influx of people from Bangladesh will likely rise.<sup>134</sup>

**Impact on host communities:** Forced displacement itself can be a source of tension and potential conflict. Many internally displaced people and refugees rely on the environment for survival, such as for food, shelter and income generation activities. The sudden additional pressure on the environment and added competition for natural resources can lead to friction with host communities worsening the relations between refugees and their non-refugee neighbours.

The unsustainable use of natural resources by displaced communities can also lead to environmental degradation with lasting effects.<sup>135</sup> The UNHCR has worked to reduce the environmental impact of refugee crises through renewable energy options, reforestation activities and access to clean fuels for cooking.<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/how-climate-change-exacerbates-the-refugee-crisis-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/>

<sup>134</sup> <https://en.reset.org/knowledge/environmental-refugees---how-climate-change-affects-peoples-lives>

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

<sup>136</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2019/10/5da5e18c4/climate-change-and-displacement.html>



# Relevant UN Actions

## Actions on climate change

UNHCR recognises that the consequences of climate change are extremely serious. As such,

UNHCR's work on climate change and disaster-related displacement covers four main areas:

- 1) Legal advice, guidance and the development of norms to support the enhanced protection of the rights of people who are displaced in this context.
- 2) Promoting policy coherence to ensure that issues are effectively mainstreamed.
- 3) Research to fill gaps that underpin this operational and policy work.
- 4) Field-based activities to avert, minimise and address internal and cross-border displacement, including reducing the environmental impact of refugee settlements and ensuring sustainable responses to displacement.<sup>137</sup>

UNHCR is a standing invitee to the Steering Group of the Platform on Disaster Displacement. The Platform on Disaster Displacement is a state-led initiative focussed on the implementation of the Nansen Initiative's Protection Agenda.<sup>138</sup>

UNHCR is already involved in emergencies in which climate change, extreme weather events and environmental degradation are a factor. For example, in 2018, UNHCR airlifted thousands of tents to Western Afghanistan for more than a quarter of a million people displaced by a mixture of conflict and severe drought. Moreover, in 2019, when tropical cyclone Idai hit Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, UNHCR relocated refugee families to safer shelters and provided them with tents, plastic sheeting, sanitation equipment and clean water.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

<sup>138</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

<sup>139</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

## Outcomes of COP27: Establishment of Loss and Damage Fund and significance for climate displacement

The establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund was widely considered to be the highlight of last year's COP27 conference, which took place in November in Sharm El-Sheikh. Loss and Damages refers to 'the negative consequences that arise from the unavoidable risks of climate change, like rising sea levels, prolonged heatwaves, desertification, the acidification of the sea and extreme events, such as bushfires, species extinction and crop failures.<sup>140</sup>'. The Loss and Damages Fund will fill a vital role in filling the gaps in climate finance that are not addressed by pre-existing institutions such as the Green Climate Fund, and represents a major step forward in efforts increase contributions from developed countries – also the countries with the highest levels of greenhouse gas emissions<sup>141</sup> – to the developing countries which disproportionately bear the impact of climate change.

Developing countries had long lobbied for the inclusion of Loss and Damages into the global climate response, and now that this has been achieved the next question is how the fund can be effectively deployed. Given the nature of the drought in East Africa, which it has been estimated was made at least a hundred times more likely by the effects of climate change<sup>142</sup>, it is an obvious target for the use of Loss and Damages funding to help the region to cope and eventually recover. A key part of this should be providing support to people displaced by climate change, as it is clear that with changing weather patterns the situation is only likely to intensify.

---

<sup>140</sup> <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/what-you-need-know-about-cop27-loss-and-damage-fund#:~:text=Loss%20and%20damage%20refers%20to,species%20extinction%20and%20crop%20failures>.

<sup>141</sup> *Emissions Gap Report 2022*. United Nations Environment Programme, p7.

<sup>142</sup> *Human-induced climate change increased drought severity in Horn of Africa*. World Weather Attribution, 2023, p2.

## Relevant UN Actions in East Africa

### UN Peacekeeping missions

United Nations organisations including UNHCR are already engaged in a large scale on East Africa, delivering aid to the region. The UN currently maintains peacekeeping missions in Sudan and South Sudan. Additionally, in April 2022 the United Nations Security Council voted to approve the creation of a new peacekeeping operation in Somalia led by the African Union. This new mission, named Atmis, will replace the existing peacekeeping mission in the country which is staffed by close to 20,000 military, police and civilian personnel<sup>143</sup>.

### UNHCR support for refugees and displaced people

According to UNHCR figures, at the end of 2021 the East Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region was host to 4.9 million refugees and asylum seekers and 12 million internally displaced people<sup>144</sup>, a number which is only likely to increase as the drought has worsened. Both UNHCR and the World Food Programme face a severe funding shortfall in the region which has limited efforts to provide relief, with UNHCR's regional budget of \$1.9 billion only 50% funded by the end of the year<sup>145</sup>. For 2023 the regional budget has been set at \$2.021 billion, but in reality there is an ongoing shortfall in funding. Late 2022 saw a ceasefire agreed in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, which was witness to ongoing conflict between Tigrayan militia forces and the Ethiopian government for the proceeding two years. However, many people remain displaced by the conflict and extensive damage to local infrastructure remains. Additionally, the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023 is likely to contribute to regional destabilisation and risks prompting another refugee crisis.

---

<sup>143</sup> <https://www.africanews.com/2022/04/01/un-security-council-approves-new-peacekeeping-force-in-somalia/>

<sup>144</sup> Executive summary of UNHCR Global Report 2021, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalreport2021/ehagl>

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Despite the funding shortfall, UNHCR was able to provide assistance to millions of people displaced in the region, working in refugee camps in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and others to expand capacity and provide protection assistance, shelter, water, sanitation, healthcare and logistics support<sup>146</sup>.

UNHCR has been aided by the creation in 2018 of the Global Compact on Refugees, a framework for ‘more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation’, intended to serve as a blueprint for governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders to provide support for refugee host countries and enable refugees to lead productive lives<sup>147</sup>.

## Proposed Solutions

### Policies to address climate change and displacement

In order to address climate change and displacement, some of the following solutions could be implemented. This set of proposed solutions is by no means exhaustive, and it might even be in the policy of certain nations to oppose them.

**Planned Relocation:** In order to protect communities from hazards that threaten to render certain area uninhabitable, planned relocation can be implemented—the long-term movement of a community from one location to another, in which important characteristics of the original community are retained.<sup>148</sup> The relocation of communities in the context of environmental and climate change is increasingly being implemented by governments, with tens of thousands of people being relocated in Haiti and Vietnam, as well as hundreds of thousands in Ethiopia, about a million in the Philippines and several millions in China.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> *Global Compact on Refugees*. United Nations, 2018, p III.

<sup>148</sup> [https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental\\_migration](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental_migration)

<sup>149</sup> [https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental\\_migration](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental_migration)

UNHCR has experience in providing guidance on planned relocation. Alongside Georgetown University and other partners, UNHCR has developed guidance on the planned relocation of at-risk populations to protect them from disasters and the impact of climate change whilst respecting their human rights.<sup>150</sup>

Another instance of policy creation is Vanuatu, which has created a comprehensive policy on climate change and disaster-induced displacement, which includes developing safeguards and standard operating procedures for planned relocation.<sup>151</sup>

**Resilient City Centres:** For example, following recent flooding in Japan, there has been a plan to rebuild the city centres on resilience. The aim is to build a ‘resilient city’ for future generations as well as strengthen its capacity to deal with the future effects of weather change, such as the heavy flooding that affected areas of southern Japan. This construction has included building 12.5-metre high seawalls surrounding the bay and elevating the city centre.<sup>152</sup>

Moreover, in Bangladesh, there has been a move to create ‘climate-resilient, migrant-friendly’ towns, such that those who are uprooted due to coastal flooding and river erosion do not end up in informal settlements. A dozen inland towns have been identified that are far away from low-lying coastal areas and have populations of about 500,000, which could be increased to 1,500,000 and transformed into climate-resilient towns. As part of the project, a number of initiatives aim to prepare the inhabitants of the identified towns to help migrants reintegrate in their new environment.<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2019/10/5da5e18c4/climate-change-and-displacement.html>

<sup>151</sup> <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/11/21/from-caution-creative-solutions-necessary-evolution-climate-migration-debate>

<sup>152</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/innovative-solutions- plight-climate-migrants-190630170338398.html>

<sup>153</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/innovative-solutions- plight-climate-migrants-190630170338398.html>

**Education:** For example, in Bangladesh, there have been initiatives to encourage and support students from vulnerable coastal areas to move inland for studies. Scholarships encourage students to move from low-lying coastal areas, with the hope that their parents will follow them.<sup>154</sup>

**Expanded protection mechanisms:** In light of the definition of ‘refugee’ in the 1951 Refugee Convention, a popular form of expanded protection has been humanitarian visas. For example, New Zealand offered special humanitarian visas to climate-affected Pacific Islanders in 2017. Moreover, in 2019, U.S. Senator Ed Markey introduced a bill to recognise ‘climate-displaced persons’ that would welcome up to 50,000 people in an individual fiscal year to resettle in the United States.<sup>155</sup>

**Anticipating and preventing climate-fuelled displacement:** Early warning systems and forecasting can help better prepare the response to climate related events. For example, in August 2017, UNHCR took part in an exercise led by the governments of Costa Rica and Panama to simulate a disaster and deal in real time with the ‘virtual fallout’.<sup>156</sup>

**Mitigating the environmental impact of displacement:** UN agencies and partner organisations are seeking new ways to reduce the environmental impact of mass displacement. For example, UNHCR has supported a program to distribute liquefied petroleum gas to Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh, providing a clean and reliable source of energy for cooking. The aim was to reduce foraging for firewood, which can antagonise local populations, and reduce the harmful health and environmental effects associated with burning fuel in inefficient stoves. Another example is the fact that the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan became the world’s first refugee camp powered by renewable energy in 2017.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/innovative-solutions-plight-climate-migrants-190630170338398.html>

<sup>155</sup> <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/11/21/from-caution-creative-solutions-necessary-evolution-climate-migration-debate>

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/why-unhcr-is-taking-action-on-climate-change-displacement/>

<sup>157</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

**Investment:** A variety of investments could create more resilience to the effects of climate change, thereby delaying displacement. For example, the climate change factors that lead to migration in Northwest Africa could be addressed by supporting irrigation infrastructure, providing food supplies, fostering regional water cooperation and supporting livelihood security.<sup>158</sup>

**Prompt Response:** The evidence shows that when people receive prompt and adequate assistance in the aftermath of a disaster, they are more likely to stay and rebuild rather than move on. By contrast, a lack of durable solutions may push people to keep moving onward.<sup>159</sup>

**Research:** Research is required to determine how to improve the migratory process itself. This could involve increasing migration monitors, providing safer modes of transport or consolidating and expanding destination country integration resources.<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>158</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-climate-crisis-migration-and-refugees/>

<sup>159</sup> <https://disasterdisplacement.org/staff-member/managing-displacement-in-the-era-of-climate-change>

<sup>160</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-climate-crisis-migration-and-refugees/>

## Questions a Resolution Must Answer

- Should the term ‘climate refugee’ be utilised?
- Should there be a new legal framework for people displaced due to climate change?
- How to take account of the fact that displacement may result from multiple factors?
- Who should take responsibility when people are displaced because of climate change, extreme weather events, environmental degradation and natural disasters?
- How to ensure that the international response to environmental displacement also focuses on slow onset phenomena, such as desertification and rising sea levels?
- How to prevent tensions or conflicts that may arise between displaced communities and host communities?
- Can UNHCR benefit from recent developments in climate finance such as the Loss and Damages fund to make up its funding shortfall?
- How can the East Africa region be given climate-resilient development assistance?
- How can escalation of the refugee crisis be averted?

Additionally, you must formulate a solution to the crisis as it develops over the course of the committee sessions.



# Bloc Positions

## Developing countries overview

countries are the most exposed to the impacts of climate change and are also host to the largest numbers of refugees and displaced people. As discussed in the section on Loss and Damages, a key priority for most developing countries has been to encourage developed countries to take on more of the financial burden of combatting climate change and mitigating its worst effects, as they have played a disproportionately large role in contributing to climate change and have exponentially greater financial resources at their disposal. Countries that are host to large numbers of displaced people will desire support in providing assistance to them, especially if they are likely to be located to the host country long-term. In the case of internal displacement caused directly by that government's actions, however, such as in an active war zone, they may be resistant if there is a perception of extensive international intervention in their domestic affairs so may be resistant to some forms of aid.

## Developed countries overview

Developed countries are the principal source of funding for UNHRC's activities, however their exact stance towards engagement with UNHCR will vary considerably depending on their individual foreign policy. Some countries maintain high levels of funding contributions and have also been very proactive in their efforts to combat climate change, while others have been more resistant. This is dependent on each individual country's government and its priorities.

## Refugee host countries outside the region

Although the majority of displaced people remain in their own countries and the majority of refugees – 72% - live in countries that share borders with their country of origin<sup>161</sup>, many refugees will leave their region of origin and seek to resettle elsewhere, fleeing desperate conditions and persecution or hoping to rebuild more economically stable lives. There is a key distinction to be made between refugees and economic migrants. The EU defines an economic migrant as ‘A person who leaves their country of origin purely for economic reasons that are not in any way related to the refugee definition, in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood’ and they are not entitled to the same protection as refugees under international law. In the case of climate driven displacement and migration, however, as can be seen from the debate over the term ‘climate refugee’ above, the distinction is often far from clear cut. Whether the people in question are formally classified as refugees or not, the ongoing crisis in the Horn of Africa region contributes to increased migration of displaced people into surrounding countries which appear to offer safer conditions and/or a higher standard of living.

Many surrounding countries in North Africa and the Middle East are host to large number of refugees and other displaced people, not only from East Africa but from other parts of the continent and war-torn states such as Syria. This exerts a considerable burden on the host countries, who are themselves low-or-middle countries. These countries are likely to support resolutions which minimise this burden, either by reducing the amount of refugees entering the country or by stepping up foreign-funded efforts to support them. The extent to which these host countries are welcoming to refugees varies considerably between countries.

Across the Mediterranean, European countries are host to far smaller numbers of refugees than countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Only 10% of the world’s refugees were estimated to

---

<sup>161</sup> [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwuqiiBhBtEiwATgvixJSvZEtGx007VB7Sr9EF0PwWifYY3z\\_bADYIzNeXjFapCzXNSH84hBoCkkoQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwuqiiBhBtEiwATgvixJSvZEtGx007VB7Sr9EF0PwWifYY3z_bADYIzNeXjFapCzXNSH84hBoCkkoQAvD_BwE)

live in the EU at the end of 2021<sup>162</sup>, and EU countries have far greater resources to facilitate their settlement and integration. However, while some EU countries have been comparatively welcoming to refugees, such as Germany which is host to around 1.24 million<sup>163</sup> (half of whom fled from Syria), in recent years concerns about large numbers of refugees and possibility of illegal migration have become pressing political issues in a large number of European countries. Some countries may be open to accepting more people displaced by conflict and natural disasters, but others would be very reluctant or actively hostile to the idea. Such countries would be likely to favour solutions which resettle refugees and displaced people closer to their countries of origin, or support their return to their home countries where possible. Even for countries which do not experience such high levels of concern over refugees and immigration, these kinds of policies are likely to be appealing as a cost-effective solution that carries lower levels of domestic political risk.

The response of European countries will also be strongly influenced by their governments' policy on responding to climate change and the extent to which it is a political priority, as well as the extent to which they support higher levels of income and corporation tax which can be used to fund development aid.

## Countries with extensive interests in the region

Many countries are located far from the region geographically so are not directly affected by the refugee crisis, and do not maintain particularly close ties with the countries experiencing the crisis. These states are likely to view the situation in the Horn of Africa through the prism of their own policies on refugees and climate change closer to home, and any shared interests they have with the countries that are directly involved.

---

<sup>162</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe\\_en#:~:text=Fact%20to%20consider%3A%20at%20the,compared%20to%20its%20total%20population.](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en#:~:text=Fact%20to%20consider%3A%20at%20the,compared%20to%20its%20total%20population.)

<sup>163</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/germany>

Other countries, however, maintain extensive ties with states in the Horn of Africa, and are likely to be far more closely involved in any possible outcome and place more of a priority on finding long-term solutions. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa is growing and reached a record of \$83 billion in 2021<sup>164</sup>. One major contributor to FDI in East Africa is China, with Ethiopia being a critical hub for the Belt and Road Initiative. China's investment in Ethiopia alone totalled \$4.5 billion in 2021, meaning it has a strong interest in maintaining stability in the country<sup>165</sup>. Other major investors in Ethiopia are Saudi Arabia, the USA, and Turkey<sup>166</sup>. China is also the largest investor in Sudan, followed by Germany and Qatar<sup>167</sup>, while Germany and the USA are the principal investors in Somalia<sup>168</sup>. Countries with strong ties to the Horn of Africa, including large-scale FDI programmes, are likely to be the most supportive of measures which contribute to greater stability and improved development in the region, and willing to make the greatest effort to implement large-scale projects.

## Suggestions for Further Research

### On climate change and displacement in general

The resource that proved the most useful was the website of the UNHCR itself, as it provided an insight into the intricacies of the current situation and measures that UNHCR has undertaken in the past in order to mitigate these issues. The following resources were particularly helpful and insightful.

<https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

This website provides an insightful insight into the variety of ways in which UNHCR is working to mitigate climate change and disasters, as well as why climate change and displacement is a key

---

<sup>165</sup> <https://unctad.org/news/investment-flows-africa-reached-record-83-billion-2021>

<sup>166</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-investment-climate-statements/ethiopia/>

<sup>167</sup> <https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/fragility-resilience/promoting-private-investment-in-transition-countries/the-horn-of-africa-opportunity/country-profiles/sudan>

<sup>168</sup> <https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/fragility-resilience/promoting-private-investment-in-transition-countries/the-horn-of-africa-opportunity/country-profiles/somalia>

issue that ought to be addressed. It also provides a helpful introduction into the term ‘climate refugee’.

<https://helprefugees.org/news/the-plight-and-rise-of-climate-refugees/>

This website provides an interesting discussion of whether the term migrant or refugee should be utilised to describe those displaced on account of climate change and other environmental factors. Given that the issue of how those displaced on account of climate change should be categorised is one that has not been addressed, this is a highly useful read.

This website describes a number of interesting new approaches that have been taken by countries in regard to those displaced by natural disasters and climate change. It is helpful to gain an insight into innovative approaches that could be applied on a broader scale or in other locations.

<https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/teitiota-v-new-zealand-a-step-forward-in-the-protection-of-climate-refugees-under-international-human-rights-law/>

This website helpfully summarises the key themes of the case concerning climate refugees under international human rights law. It is not too technical and helpful in understanding the challenges of those who are displaced.

## On East Africa

UNHCR’s Africa website provides links to a variety of both detailed reports and their executive summaries detailing UNHCR’s activities in all of the countries featured in this Background Guide:

<https://www.unhcr.org/africa/>

Many of the countries discussed in this background guide appear on the International Rescue Committee Emergency Watchlist 2023

<https://www.rescue.org/uk/report/2023-emergency-watchlist>

Any of the relevant United Nations organisation websites such as those of the World Food Programme and UN Peacekeeping contain many articles with detailed information on the exact situation in all of the countries features in this background guide. They are easy to read and strongly recommended for further research.

The East African Community (EAC) Climate Change Policy represents the perspective of regional countries in responding to the climate crisis and its effects. It can be found here:

<https://www.eac.int/environment/climate-change/eac-climate-change-policy-framework>

## Bibliography

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, available at

<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>

Africa Regional Fact Sheet, International Governmental Panel on Climate Change 6th Assessment Report, p1.

Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015.

Emergency Watchlist 2023. International Rescue Committee, p28-29, 2023

Emissions Gap Report 2022. United Nations Environment Programme, p7.

Executive summary of UNHCR Global Report 2021,

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalreport2021/ehagl>

Food Security, Vulnerability and Livelihoods Across Eastern Africa: Trends and Drivers 2015-2022. World Food Programme, March 2023, p.2

Global Compact on Refugees. United Nations, 2018, p III.

[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe\\_en#:~:text=Fact%20to%20consider%3A%20at%20the,compared%20to%20its%20total%20population.](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en#:~:text=Fact%20to%20consider%3A%20at%20the,compared%20to%20its%20total%20population.)

<https://disasterdisplacement.org/staff-member/managing-displacement-in-the-era-of-climate-change>

<https://en.reset.org/knowledge/environmental-refugees---how-climate-change-affects-peoples-lives>

<https://grist.org/article/climate-refugee-number-definition/>

<https://helprefugees.org/news/the-plight-and-rise-of-climate-refugees/>

[https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental\\_migration](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/environmental_migration)

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/07/1043551>

<https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/teitiota-v-new-zealand-a-step-forward-in-the-protection-of-climate-refugees-under-international-human-rights-law/>

<https://therevelator.org/climate-refugees-legal/>

<https://time.com/5206716/world-bank-climate-change-internal-migration/>

<https://unctad.org/news/investment-flows-africa-reached-record-83-billion-2021>

<https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/fragility-resilience/promoting-private-investment-in-transition-countries/the-horn-of-africa-opportunity/country-profiles/somalia>

<https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/fragility-resilience/promoting-private-investment-in-transition-countries/the-horn-of-africa-opportunity/country-profiles/sudan>

<https://www.africanews.com/2022/04/01/un-security-council-approves-new-peacekeeping-force-in-somalia/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/innovative-solutions-plight-climate-migrants-190630170338398.html>

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-climate-crisis-migration-and-refugees/>

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabaab>

<https://www.climateforesight.eu/migrations/environmental-migrants-up-to-1-billion-by-2050/>

[https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge\\_detail/protecting-climate-refugees-is-crucial-for-the-future/](https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/protecting-climate-refugees-is-crucial-for-the-future/)

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/20/621782275/the-refugees-that-the-world-barely-pays-attention-to>

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25482&LangID=E>

<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/11/21/from-caution-creative-solutions-necessary-evolution-climate-migration-debate>

<https://www.safecom.org.au/foe-climate-guide.htm>

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-investment-climate-statements/ethiopia/>

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/06/lets-talk-about-climate-migrants-not-climate-refugees/>

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/what-you-need-know-about-cop27-loss-and-damage->

[fund#:~:text=Loss%20and%20damage%20refers%20to,species%20extinction%20and%20crop%20failures.](#)

<https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

<https://www.unhcr.org/5df9f01b4>

<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr>

<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/where-we-work>

<https://www.unhcr.org/centralasia/en/our-mandate>

<https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

<https://www.unhcr.org/countries/germany>

<https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/afghanistan-emergency>

<https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/why-unhcr-is-taking-action-on-climate-change-displacement/>

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-refugees-and-displaced-people-need-seats-cop28-table>



<https://www.unhcr.org/news/horn-africa-drought-enters-sixth-failed-rainy-season-unhcr-calls-urgent->

assistance#:~:text=As%20the%20Horn%20of%20Africa,UNHCR%20calls%20for%20urgent%20assistance

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2019/10/5da5e18c4/climate-change-and-displacement.html>

<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/how-climate-change-exacerbates-the-refugee-crisis-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/>

Human-induced climate change increased drought severity in Horn of Africa. World Weather Attribution, 2023, p2.

Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

[https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwuqiiBhBtEiwATgvixJSvZEtGxoO7VB7Sr9EFoPwWIfYY3z\\_bADYIzNeXjFapCzXNSH84hBoCkkoQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwuqiiBhBtEiwATgvixJSvZEtGxoO7VB7Sr9EFoPwWIfYY3z_bADYIzNeXjFapCzXNSH84hBoCkkoQAvD_BwE)

UNHCR's Initiative on Internal Displacement, 2020-2021