

Forum: *Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)*

Issue: *Addressing the role of climate change on human migration*

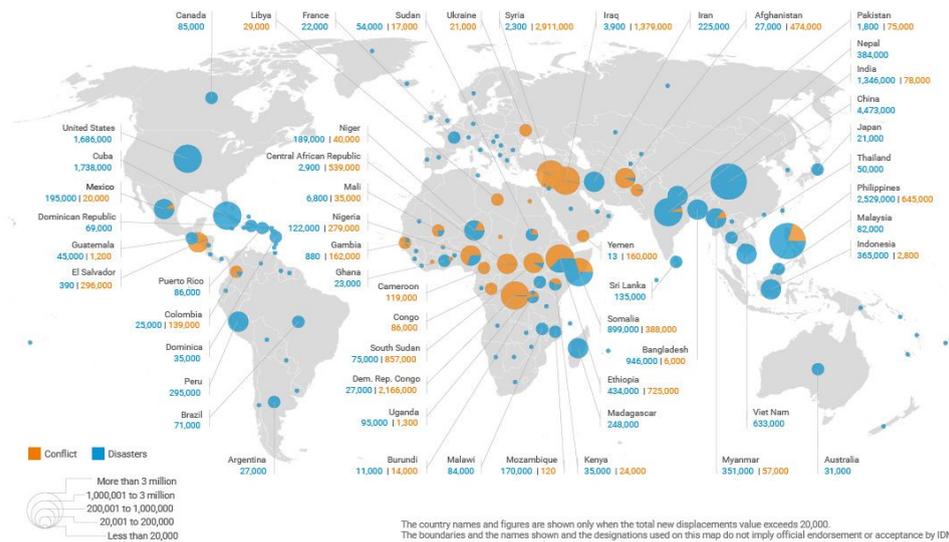
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Introduction

Although climate change has traditionally been a natural phenomenon since the creation of mankind, increasing human activities come with detrimental environmental impacts, adding a new dimension to the many existing forces driving environmental migrants. The population of environmental migrants and earth's rapid worsening draws a direct proportion— there are more and more environmental migrants amidst extreme weather patterns, natural disasters, and rising sea levels are occurring at increasingly rates. Proven by scientists to be real and caused by human activities, climate change damages land used for both farming and living, hurting those in developing countries harder than others as their countries lack proper infrastructure and resilience to such changes. Therefore, when their homes across the world become uninhabitable, environmental migrants will have no choice but to be part of human migration and move both within and abroad international borders.

However, as opposed to refugees fleeing from persecution, violence, and wars, environmental migrants do not receive proper recognition under international law and are often seen as economic migrants. As a result, many countries fail to tackle these internally displaced within its own borders and are unwilling to accept others trying to apply for asylum-seeking status. However, as the problem will continue to worsen in the future for nations worldwide— whether developed or developing, island or landlocked, large or small— earth's rapid aggravation calls for the full acknowledgement of the situation to come up with measures targeted toward alleviating the consequences of climate exacerbation on environmental migrants.



#1: A map showing the 30.6 million people displaced across 143 countries, with disasters affecting a far great portion of the world compared to conflicts.

Definition of Key Terms

Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers refers to people who leave or flee their home country for another nation where they undergo a legal process to seek international assistance and protection. Although asylum seekers may qualify as a refugee or a displaced person, an individual only becomes an asylum seeker if a formal appeal was made for permanent residence and citizenship.

Climate Change

Stretching over a vast time span, climate change is a phenomenon in nature characterized by a drastic change in weather patterns— normally a consistent increase in temperature— caused by certain human activities that increase greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere.

Environmental Migrants

As environmental migrants are loosely defined under international terms, the term usually refers to people who are forced to leave their homes because of both short and long-term changes to the environment. They can do so either temporarily or permanently, and either domestically or internationally.

Human Migration

Human migration, both within and across countries, is a process where people move from an old place to a new place in order to settle there.

Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

Internally Displaced People, or IDPs, are people forced to leave their homes but still remain in their own country's borders. Such populations are often unable to receive aid and sufficient support because they're still technically under their own government's protection.

Migrants

Varying from refugees who are forced to flee, migrants are people who make a deliberate choice to leave their home country in search of new work opportunities, better living conditions, or other purposes, as they are not necessarily forced to flee or escape.

Refugees

Refugees are people forced to leave their homes and cross international borders in escape of persecution, violence, or war. Defined by the United Nations, refugees enter a new country with a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion". Such individuals are often afraid or unable to receive protection and return to their home country.

Repatriation

Usually done unwillingly, repatriation is the process of refugees returning back to their own country after failing to seek asylum status.

Background Information

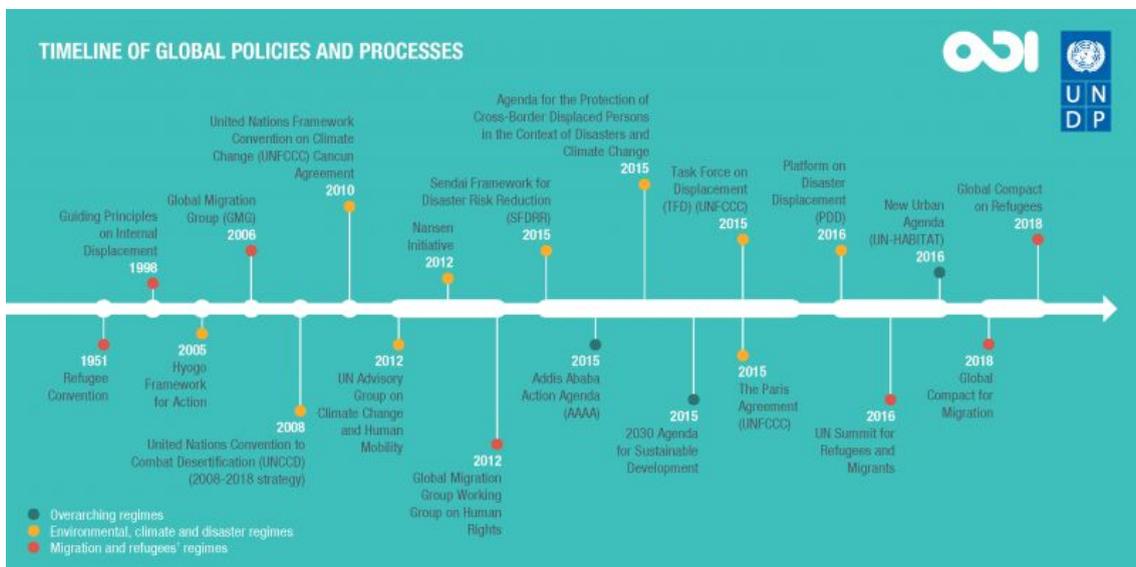
Environmental Causes Excluded from Refugees

The 1951 Refugee Convention was created following large numbers of refugees after World War II (WWII), especially those escaping Eastern Europe. Under international law, the 1951 Refugee Convention provided a internationally-recognized definition for refugees, in addition to various rights and responsibilities granted once one receives asylum status by another country. The 1967 Protocol further extended the definition by including events after January 1st, 1951 and of areas outside the continent of

Europe. Consequently, UN agencies responsible for dealing with refugees struggle to even deal with those fleeing from persecution and war, let alone the many environmental migrants seeking protection. Even today, only the definitions of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration consider those fleeing from natural disasters as refugees.

History and International Actions of Climate Change

Throughout the history of the Earth, climate change has been a natural-occurring process with records of seven cycles since 650,000 years ago. However, modern weather patterns from the past centuries thenceforth are increasingly impacted by the detrimental consequences of human activities and exercises in nature. In spite of multiple scientific discoveries in the 1800s and 1900s, such as the greenhouse effect and greenhouse gases, clear signs of global warming in the Earth's atmosphere were only seen with extreme temperature rises in the 1980s. Thus, in 1988, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established by the UN in order to address climate change and its impacts from a scientific view. With varying successes, the international community worked together in coming up with solutions to combat climate change— most notably the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement. Both of them either extend or are under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a global treaty signed by all 197 UN member states to address climate change.



#2: A timeline that includes major international agreements and conferences on both climate change and refugees, some of which have an impact on environmental migrants.

Types of Environmental Migrants

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the three types of environmental migrants— either emergency, forced, or motivated— differ on both their cause and urgency. Environmental

emergency migrants, the most urgent, are people who flee because of sudden, unexpected natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis. Environmental forced migrants flee for gradually worsening conditions like coastal erosion and deforestation, while environmental motivated migrants flee for possible future problems, the least urgent of all. Similarly, environmental migrants can also be classified as temporary, imperative, or pressured. Temporary environmental migrants are those fleeing short-term from natural disasters but can still return home after it is rebuilt and safe. Imperative environmental migrants are displaced by gradually coming changes impacting their livings that they can't control, and pressured environmental migrants are displaced by predicted results of global warming, such as desertification and droughts.

Key Issues

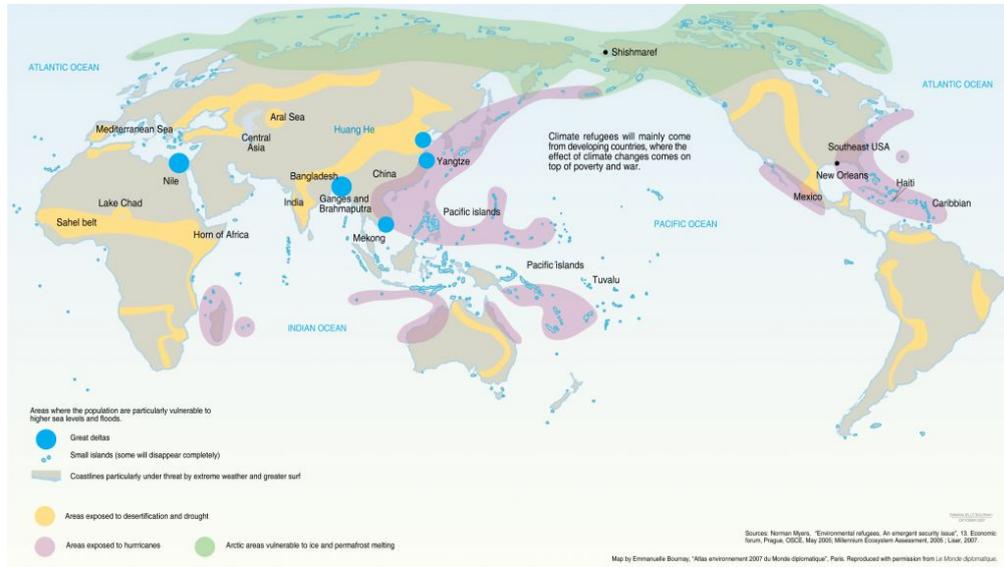
Economic or Environmental Migrants

In some cases, it is difficult to tell whether migrants or refugees fled for economic reasons or environmental reasons. Further complicating the issue, while economic migrants— also referred to as migrant workers— have a clear definition, environmental migrants are neither encompassed under the universal definition of refugees nor explicitly defined with its own terms. Most environmental migrants are from rural areas where the environment plays an important role in farming and hunting. When climate change forces them to flee, they are often seen as economic migrants trying to look for a new job when their homes might already be uninhabitable. As a result, even though there are clear differences between the two, many countries try to regard environmental migrants as economic migrants in order to purposely limit immigration. Countries don't have a legal obligation to take in economic migrants unlike what they have for refugees, making it difficult for economic refugees to be granted asylum status.

Increasingly Extreme Weather Patterns

With an increasing number and frequency of extreme weather patterns, climate change has become and will continue to be an important problem. In the past decades, increased greenhouse gas emissions and other human activities have led to higher temperatures, more natural disasters, and rising sea levels experienced by countries across the world. This would add onto current economic, political, and social problems, future worsening the situation of human migration. Global warming not only causes small islands like Kiribati, the Maldives, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu to disappear due to rising sea levels. It also has huge impacts on Asia for its densely populated areas near the ocean and a high number of monsoons and typhoons, as well as Africa and Latin America for their droughts and rising sea

levels. As the pattern continues, tens of millions of people— where there isn't a clear estimate due to the lack of an exact definition— would become environmental migrants forced to flee their homes.



#3: A map showing places that will most likely be affected by increasing extreme weather patterns, generating environmental migrants as a result.

Skepticism towards Climate Change

Although an overwhelming majority of scientists have proven climate change to be a true phenomenon caused by human activities, skepticism still remains on its cause and even its existence in general. Results from seven research papers published between 2004 and 2015— many of which are conducted by professional organizations and research institutes— show a 91% to 100% agreement that global warming is caused by human activities. However, despite the overwhelming 97% of scientists voicing their support for such consensus, certain international figures and members of the public still claim controversy or deny the criticality of climate change in relation to environmental issues today. These people advocate for the existence of climate change being slow and insignificant, resembling a natural cycle, and is rather created for money and politics. To this end, without everyone acknowledging the mere reality and criticality, the international community couldn't effectively come up with solutions aimed at solving climate change and taking in environmental migrants.

Studies into scientific agreement on human-caused global warming



#4: The scientific consensus on climate change, showing the seven studies and their percentages of it being caused by human activities.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Bangladesh

Bangladesh, along with the other South Asian countries of India and Pakistan, has been one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Much of the country is situated on low elevations, and due to its position on the Indian Ocean, cyclones, floods, river erosions, and storms, also frequently happen. All of which is expected to happen by 2050, even a one-meter rise in sea level would put 20% of the country underwater and displace about 15 to 30 million people. Even today, as agricultural lands are damaged, people whose lives previously depended on farming and fishing in rural areas are now forced to migrate, often ending up at urban slums in the capital Dhaka and neighboring India. Yet, both the Bangladeshi and Indian governments, as well as many others in the region, refuse to acknowledge the situation and treat these people as refugees.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Found in 1951 at Geneva, Switzerland, the IOM is an intergovernmental organization and UN-related organization initially created to deal with WWII refugees. Nowadays, with 172 member states as well as observers and partners in various fields, it is responsible for dealing with economic migrants, IDPs, and refugees. In 2015, it created the Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division (MECC), being the first of its type to deal with refugees generated by climate change and other

environmental causes. To them, the IOM aims at facilitating migration, preventing forced migration, and providing assistance and protection, with it does together by cooperating with the international community for actions and research.

Kiribati

Kiribati is one of many small island nations suffering the severe consequences of climate change as the entire island is just meters above sea level. Due to global warming, sea levels are currently rising at 3.2 mm an year and steadily increasing to an even faster rate. Under this pattern, experts expect Kiribati to be uninhabitable in 30 years, making relocation for its people unwillingly yet absolutely necessary. The government purchased land in Fiji and opened opportunities for migrating to Australia and New Zealand in hopes for its citizens to do so willingly and prevent forced migration. However, even though the World Bank also supports a similar program, citizens of Kiribati and other islands have been rejected in their asylum-seeking processes as environmental reasons are not considered as refugees.

People's Republic of China

As the country with the largest CO₂ emissions, the economy of China— and to an extent other newly industrialized countries— is largely dependent on its production and manufacturing. In order to maximize its economic growth, the country's actions come at the cost of producing greenhouse gases and relying on the environment. The Chinese government created programs that resettled its citizens in newly-built villages to solve droughts and other disasters, both man-made and natural. Therefore, while China and countries with similar situations would want to solve the issue, they would support helping environmental migrants and reducing global warming through other means; the nation would avoid cutting greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid damaging their industries and thus their economies.

United Nations (UN)

As environmental migrants are not encompassed under the 1951 Refugee Convention, the UN has no legal basis to effectively deal with the overwhelming growth of such migrants across the globe. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are two of the major branches of the UN dealing with this issue. The UNEP deals with a wide variety of crises regarding climate and the environment, including climate change, disasters, and conflicts. The UNHCR funnels aid and provides support to refugees, with those fleeing from persecution and politics under its current mandate. In an effort to include environmental migrants, the Maldives proposed an amendment to include it to the 1951 Refugee Convention, while the UNEP already began to address to issue and to find solutions for it.

With 146 parties, the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees entered into force. Extending the definition of a refugee, it removed limits on location and time the 1951 convention had.

Environmental Migrant Proposed

March 3rd, 1976

In Worldwatch Institute's Twenty-Two Dimensions of the Population Problem, the term environmental migrant was first proposed by one of its authors, Lester Brown.

The UNFCCC Adopted

May 9th, 1992

Later opening up for signatures at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, the UNFCCC was adopted by the UN. This paved the way for future climate change conferences, as well as future agreements and extensions.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement Published

July 22nd, 1998

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were published under the UN to outline available protection and serve as a framework for the 25 million IDPs at that time.

Hurricane Katrina Passed Through

August 29th, 2005

When Hurricane Katrina passed through, it generated huge amounts of rainfall and flooding in the southern US, especially in New Orleans, Louisiana. This led to many people being displaced from their homes, and the term environmental refugees to be wrongly used to describe them.

Syrian Civil War Began

March 15th, 2011

The beginning of the Syrian Civil War caused a huge wave of refugees from Syria to other countries in the Middle East and Europe. Other than violence and war, the drought was also an environmental cause that caused them to flee.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951
- Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 4 October 1967
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 9 May 1992
- Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 22 July 1998

- Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations, 15 December 2005 **(A/RES/60/124)**
- Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Africa, 16 December 2005, **(A/RES/60/128)**
- Protection of the human rights of migrants: strengthening the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrants, including in large movements, 15 July 2016 **(A/HRC/RES/32/14)**
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 19 December 2016 **(A/RES/71/172)**

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

To solve the issue at hand, multiple countries and other international actors have taken actions that could be divided into three main categories— solving climate change itself, reducing the impacts of climate change, and dealing with environmental migrants. While many countries take individual actions, the majority of what the international community did falls under the UNFCCC and what is reached under its conferences. In terms of inclusiveness, the UNFCCC itself can be considered as a success by including all 197 UN member states. Likewise, most of its following agreements also included all member states with only a few exceptions, including the United States in certain cases. However, the Kyoto Protocol's set targets weren't actually met in reality, and the Copenhagen Accords failed to come up with a legally binding agreement. The Paris Agreement, even though it was a diplomatic success, contained unlikely targets with no plans for reach them and no consequences for failing or withdrawing.

When reducing the impacts of climate change, many countries— both developing and developed— have taken various attempts. Most common in African communities, housing conditions were improved through the use of modern materials, stronger foundations, and protection measures such as sandbags. Another common approach for farmers was also to diversify previously economies that solely relied on agriculture and grow genetically-modified crops able to sustain impacts. Countries like China and India improved their basic infrastructures to handle extreme rainfall causing flash floods, while those like Japan came up with early warning system to earthquakes and tsunamis. The United Kingdom also funded BRACED project, fully known as Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters, which established 15 projects in the African Sahel as well as South and Southeast Asia. Most of these attempts have been considered as successful in individual cases, most notably Bangladesh's extreme flooding events and Japan's 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake and Tsunami. Yet, they can only reduce instead of completely eliminate casualties and financial losses because they address the effects, rather than the root causes, of climate change.

The UN negotiated the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), which for the first time in history, included environmental migrants as part of the framework. It is non-legally binding and the conference was only held recently in December 2018. But, the United States wasn't part of the negotiations while others have criticized the lack of differentiation between legal and illegal migrants and the reduction of national sovereignty. Also, in recent years, countries became more and more unwilling to accept environmental refugees due to domestic problems. For instance, India is building the India-Bangladesh Border Fence to stop drugs along with Bangladeshi environmental migrants and Sweden changed its open-door policy to paying them to return home. The United States, unwelcome to refugees in general, has also taken government action to deny climate change and will also be unwelcome to environmental migrants.

Possible Solutions

In order to effectively solve the issue at hand, a major yet complicated possible solution would be to amending international agreements and laws so that they would include environmental migrants and remain updated in today's changing situations. The most crucial one of these would be extending the 1951 Refugee Convention, whose definition is used by the UN, many countries, and other international actors. This could be done through submitting an amendment similar to the 1967 Protocol, the one and only ever submitted. Another way would be drafting a completely new and legally-binding convention that all member states are obligated to follow and agree to replace the old one, which previous examples like the GCM fail to accomplish because they weren't part of international law. Only through this solution can environmental migrants receive proper attention from the international community, thus removing previously-created barriers and enabling them to receive assistance, asylum status, and protection when fleeing from detrimental consequences due to climate change.

Another possible solution is to encourage all member states, more than providing financial assistance or humanitarian aid, to take in environmental migrants. To do so, it is important to understand the reasons why they wouldn't take in refugees in general and address problems such as conflicts with locals, potential economic costs, and terrorism. The solution should aim at distributing environmental migrants in a certain way, based on information such as a country's ability to take them in, so that they wouldn't all be housed by neighboring countries and no country can get away with this global problem. Likewise, just as those fleeing across international borders are crucial, it is also important to consider environmental refugees internally displaced within their home country. Proper assistance and protection given to refugees should also be given to these IDPs, as governments have to fully recognized this serious problem of rural to urban migration.

As climate change not only generates refugees of its own but also worsens the situations of those already fleeing from persecution and war, possible solutions should also be aimed at solve its effects and root causes. On the international level, more efficient climate change agreements can drafted so that every member state can agree. Unlike existing ones, it can also contain legally-binding realistic targets with incentives for countries to actually reach them while at the same time not sacrificing their economies as many are unwilling to do so. Improving resilience, from changing the lifestyles of people to using early warning systems and building protective infrastructure, can also minimize the effects of climate change and make it less necessary for people to flee their homes. All in all, possible solutions should tackle environmental migrants on multiple levels, including those that already fled their homes, are in the process of fleeing, and will be soon forced to flee in the near future.

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