

Forum: United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR)

Issue: Developing strategies for the protection of 'climate refugees' who experience displacement due to climate change and natural disasters

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Introduction To UNHCR

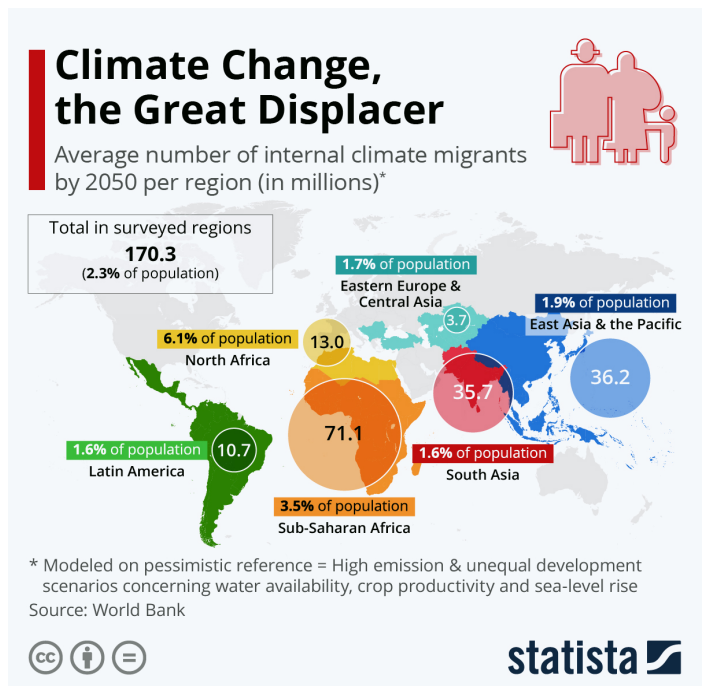
The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees is a United Nations Agency that was founded on the 14th of December 1950. The UNHCR was authorized with the main goal of helping and protecting refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, stateless people, returnees, and safeguarding individuals. The first reason that the agency was mandated was to help the people that were affected by the refugee crisis that occurred in Europe after the Second World War. The agency was planned to continue its activities for only 3 years and then disband. However, 70 years later, it continues to help people all over the world. The



UNHCR works mostly with the budget from the UN and profits gained from funding. With this capital, UNHCR provides the people in need with education, housing, therapy, healthcare, and protection. Their goals include; increasing refugee self-reliance, easing the pressure on host countries, creating safer environments for refugees to return to, and expanding opportunities to go to third countries.

Introduction To The Topic

Climate change is one of the most relevant problems in our world right now. There are numerous consequences of climate change that degrade the quality of life of the people who get affected by it. These impacts include; limited water supply, increase in natural disasters, and struggle with crop and livestock. All of these phenomena can trigger displacement and refugee crises. Most of the time climate refugee crises occur in regions where there is already displacement due to other reasons such as but not limited to; poverty, war, and discrimination. However, climate change increases displacement as it makes the environment increasingly hostile to live in. Currently, people that are exposed to displacement due to climate change are people that have already been living in a vulnerable state for a long time. In the near future, climate refugee crises will likely occur in areas of peace as well. Our job as the United



Nations High Commissioner of Refugees in this conference is not to find solutions for climate change, it is to find solutions to protect climate refugees.

Key Terms

Climate Change

Climate change refers to the long-term changes in weather patterns and major temperature shifts. Although it can occur naturally through significant changes in the solar cycle since the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels have been the driving factor for climate change.

Refugees

Are individuals who forcibly fled from their homeland by crossing an international border. Most refugees escape from violence, war, conflict, and persecution to find a safer environment in another state.

Climate Refugees

Climate refugees are people who are left in refugee status because of the consequences of climate change. Sometimes, individuals who were left internally displaced due to climate change are also referred to as climate refugees. This is not really correct as for a person to be seen as a refugee, they have to pass an international border. Therefore, UNHCR usually prefers the more general term of "people who were displaced due to climate change".

Displacement

Is usually the forced movement of a person or a people group from their homeland to another location.

Stateless People

Statelessness is when a person is not considered as a national by any country under the law. Statelessness can happen because of many factors that include: gaps in nationality laws, displacement, and discriminatory laws.

Internally Displaced People

Internally displaced people are individuals who involuntarily fled their homes by still remaining inside their state's borders.

Returnees

Are people who return to their country of origin after most of the time involuntarily staying in a foreign country. Most returnees are previous refugees.

Asylum-Seekers

Asylum seekers are individuals whose request for sanctuary has not yet been processed. In 2019 there were approximately 4.2 million people who were waiting for their request for asylum to be accepted.

Timeline

Date	Event
14th of December 1950	United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees was established
28th of July 1951	The 1951 Refugee Convention was held in Geneva, Switzerland
12th of February 1979	The First World Convention On Climate Change was held in Geneva, Switzerland
2010	One of the major droughts in the Sahel Region occurred causing the largest climate refugee crisis in recent history.
3rd of November 2020	Hurricane Eta caused one of the largest climate-related refugee crises in Central America

Further Explanation On The Topic

It may be difficult to understand why UNHCR, a refugee agency, should be involved in climate change and disaster-related displacement. The majority of that is likely to happen internally; and why, if it occurs to be capable of assisting, as a result of its global reach and resources, It should also take on the role of 'protection.' Indeed, a large body of evidence

suggests that the two are related. are intimately connected, but not in a way that is directly dependent on the approach, but it has ramifications for the institution as a whole.

In the year 2005, the UN Secretary-General issued a report emphasizing the need to improve the coordination of UN emergency humanitarian aid. His assessment found "severe capacity deficiencies" in shelter and camp management and protection, among other areas. It acknowledged that states are primarily responsible for the protection of civilians, but that "the humanitarian system must work to fill protection gaps," and that "partnerships within the system may be necessary to overcome those gaps in assistance – such as protection and camp management in situations involving internally displaced persons – that do not enjoy leadership from any one agency." These objectives were to be met in part by the IASC, which was chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). Set up to be the major source of information. The IASC, which was established to be the primary body for coordinating the UN's humanitarian assistance actions, includes both UN and non-UN actors, 15 comprising UN operational agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, FAO, WHO, UN-HABITAT, and OCHA), and one non-UN agency, IOM.

An ERC-commissioned 'humanitarian response review' published in August 2005 looked at complex (man-made) catastrophes and natural disasters, preparedness and response capacities, and protection in the aftermath of the latter. It discovered a "clear absence of acknowledgement of a commonly agreed concept of the meaning and needs of protection." While physical presence, bilateral and international diplomacy, training, education, data collecting, dissemination, lobbying, and access are all aspects of protection, at the ground level, it often boils down to questions of rights.

The review concluded that the major weaknesses in situations of internal displacement were due to the absence of accountability and leadership. The impact of the ERC and its field-level counterparts, the Humanitarian Coordinators, was 'in practice minimized by the lack of operational accountability among UN agencies for addressing IDP needs'. What was needed was a more explicit model where, sector operational accountability [would] be identified at the level of a designated organization, following standards

The lack of accountability and leadership were found to be the key flaws in circumstances of internal displacement, according to the assessment. The ERC's and its field-level counterparts, the Humanitarian Coordinators, had a limited influence because of "a lack of operational accountability among UN agencies for addressing IDP (internationally displaced people) needs." A "more explicit paradigm" was required, in which "sector operational accountability would be explicitly specified at the level of a designated entity" following standards to be agreed upon.

What it demands in a field of internal displacement may not always be obvious, and the instruments to promote it may appear to be quite different from those available for refugee protection. First, UNHCR's presence is based on the State's agreement rather than a universal mandate established and repeatedly reaffirmed by the General Assembly. In reality, the nature and necessity for protection and the mechanisms of providing protection while still providing humanitarian assistance are frequently visible at the operational level.

The IASC Principals granted UNHCR responsibility in three areas in September 2005:

- (a) conflict-related IDP protection;
- (b) emergency shelter provision; and
- (c) camp coordination and management.

UNHCR also played a part in other clusters, such as the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), where it shared responsibilities with OHCHR and UNICEF for guaranteeing the safety of individuals displaced by catastrophes.

Although some work on environmental displacement was done in the 1990s, UNHCR's systematic engagement with climate change and disaster-related displacement began in 2007. Those "forced to leave or prevented from returning because of man-made disasters," as well as those "forced to leave or prevented from returning because of natural or ecological disasters or extreme poverty," were identified as displaced people in a 1991 report by an Executive Committee Working Group on Solutions and Protection. The Working Group identified several key characteristics of such displacement, including the fact that most disaster-related displacement would be internal; some would result from 'long-term, cumulative, and ongoing processes'; states' coping capacity would be influenced in part by their level of development; states have a responsibility to implement national disaster preparedness management programs to plan for and minimizing the impacts of disasters; and greater reliance on international assistance.

In 2008, UNHCR released its first policy paper on climate change and displacement, which outlined three areas of engagement for the agency: operations management, protection strategies, and advocacy. Other policy papers were commissioned from external experts and developed in-house, and UNHCR provided updates on its own involvement with these topics. Meanwhile, the UN's efforts to improve the coordination of humanitarian aid resulted in UNHCR becoming more involved in the whole range of protection needs in cases of internal displacement.

Disasters and climate change were added to the agenda as new sources of displacement in the UNHCR's Background Paper to the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in 2010. For the first time, it also suggested normative remedies, stating that "new tools may be required to transform the needs of the displaced into tangible forms of protection."

There were fears that the GPC was not functioning properly. Although it was expected that protection in disasters required a presumption lead, clusters were not always activated, either swiftly or at all. In a letter to the High Commissioner from Australia's Permanent Representative in September 2010, the issues were stated simply and clearly:

- There was broad consensus that in natural catastrophe circumstances, there was a protection gap, and that UNHCR was well-positioned to fill it where there was no clear leadership and the affected State particularly requested help. This was a job UNHCR was already doing, and formalizing the arrangements would make it easier to respond to natural disasters in a more predictable, timely, and prepared manner.
- Some feared that formalizing UNHCR's protection role in natural catastrophe scenarios would jeopardize the organization's basic capacity. Some also believed that UNHCR should focus on completing its current mandate.
- UNHCR's operational relationship with partner organizations such as OHCHR, OCHA, and UNICEF should be mapped out more clearly, it was suggested.

The High Commissioner wrote to the ERC on October 26, 2010, expressing concern about the lack of predictable leadership of the protection cluster at the country level and proposing parameters for UNHCR's future involvement. These would necessitate two crucial prerequisites:

- (a) the state's explicit agreement,

(b) a request by the Humanitarian Coordinator, following careful negotiations with the government and the humanitarian country team. Where a protection coordination mechanism already exists and is led by another agency, UNHCR will assist that agency in its leadership role. However, if no such mechanism existed and no other organization was willing to take the lead, UNHCR would be responsible for filling the void. By letter dated November 15, 2010, the ERC confirmed the agreement.

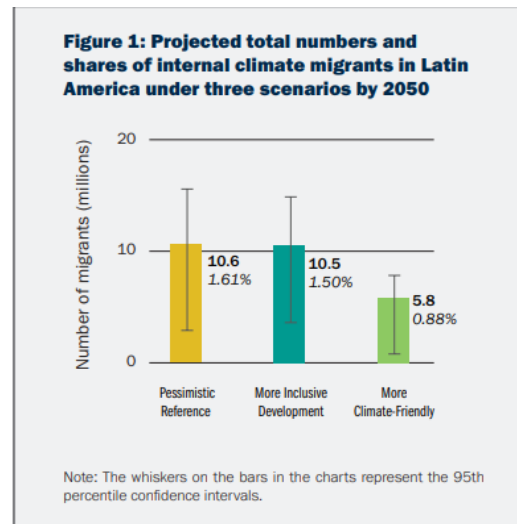
Major Parties Involved

Central America

Struggling with crime and violence that is increasingly getting worsened by drug cartels and combined with unstable public institutions, Central America is already a region that is prone to mass displacement. The added factor of climate change and the increase of natural disasters has put the region's future in jeopardy.

Lack of rainfall and rising temperatures has affected the agricultural sector of Central America very poorly. Climate change in this area creates regions that we call "dry corridors". These regions have longer periods of drought and extreme weather conditions. One of the most recent examples of this phenomenon is Hurricane Eta.

On November 3, 2020, the region was struck by extremely heavy winds and rain, which highly damaged infrastructure and lowered the quality of life in the region. The event is described as one of the worst weather-related disasters that happened in the region affecting almost three million people. As tragic as this is if we continue with our ways in the worst-case scenario by 2050 2.6% of Central America's population will become climate refugees.



The Sahel Region

The Sahel Region is a biogeographic and ecoclimatic transition area between the Sudanian savanna and the Sahara Region. It encompasses the following countries of Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. The climate of the region is considered to be tropical semi-arid According to Köppen Climate Classification. As a region with less humidity compared to other parts of the world it is prone to droughts and megadroughts. Megadroughts are dry seasons that can last for multiple decades. For example, one megadrought in this region lasted for 250 years from 1450 to 1700. Being a region that has already experienced major naturally produced droughts recent extreme climate conditions created because of human activity further worsened the situation in the region.



One of the most tragic facts about this region is that even though it is currently experiencing one of the biggest refugee crises in the world, it gets very little attention on the international stage. Similar to other regions with a large number of climate refugees, climate change was not the only factor for the refugee crisis. Acute and indiscriminate violence combined with the devastating effects of climate change resulted in 2.6 internally displaced people and 930,000 refugees and asylum seekers. The situation will get worse in the near future as by 2050 85 million people could move to Sub-Saharan Africa to escape the bad conditions in the region. Sub-Saharan Africa is also a region that is in turmoil. So if a refugee crisis such as the mentioned happens both regions will be put in jeopardy.

Bangladesh

Having rather low elevation levels and very high population density Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. With insufficient infrastructure and an economy that is highly dependent on agriculture the effect of climate change is bound to be devastating on the country. As a country that falls within the monsoon region, it is very susceptible to extreme weather conditions and human activity only worsens this factor. In the near future 1 in 7 people in Bangladesh will likely become climate refugees. The region will be prone to disasters such as but not limited to rise in sea levels, storms, cyclones, drought, erosion and landslides. The country already suffers from the refugee crisis of Rohingya people. Rohingya people are a people group who had been left stateless because of the discriminatory nationality laws of the Burma government. As a result of this most of them had to flee to other neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh. The added factor of climate refugees will make the environment of the country increasingly hostile.

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