

Academy for Talented Youth SummercampMUN



Studyguide UNGA Climate-Induced Migration

Table of Contents

1. Abbreviations
2. Introduction to the committee and the study guide
3. Climate-Induced migration
4. Cases of climate-induced migration
 - a. Kiribati
 - b. Somalia
 - c. Bangladesh
5. Issues concerning definitions
6. Questions a resolution should answer
7. Past resolutions and discussions
8. Organisations relevant to the topic of climate-induced migration
 - a. The International Organization for Migration (IOM)
 - b. The United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR)
 - c. Marrakesh Political Declaration
 - d. Nansen Initiative
9. Bloc Positions
10. Sources and further reading

Abbreviations

UNGA - United Nations General Assembly

UNHCR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

GCM - Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

IOM - International Organization for Migration

JVAP - Joint Valletta Action Plan

IDMC - UN Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

(A/RES/xx/xxx) - United Nations Document Code

(General Assembly/resolution/session/resolution number)

Introduction to the committee and the study guide

The issue of migration is among the greatest factors impacting the globalized world in the 21st century. Target 10.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals specifically mentions the need to “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.” Natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation are all major drivers of migration.

The discussions will take place in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The UNGA is tasked with finding a strong framework addressing the issue of climate-induced migration.

Keep in mind that the UNGA has the mandate to discuss all topics within the scope of the UN Charter but adopted resolutions are only recommendations to the Member States and thus not legally binding. Do not worry too much about this as your committee directors will guide you if necessary.

The following study guide is meant as a comprehensive introduction to the topic that is to be discussed in the committee. Together with the position papers and the Rules of Procedure, it will provide enough knowledge for you to fully participate in the workings of the committee but it is in no way exhaustive and you are more than welcome to research the topic further. If you wish so you can start with the sources or the resolutions mentioned.

Should you have any questions regarding the study guide, the position papers or the Rules of Procedure, please reach out to your committee directors for clarification.

Climate-induced migration

The UN Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) identifies natural disasters as the number one cause for internal or international displacement. Humans are impacted by both sudden disasters provoked or worsened by climate change including storms and floods and slow onset climate impacts such as sea level rise and drought. In some cases, the impact more or less forces people to migrate.

In recent years, climate change has caused millions of people to migrate internationally. 17.2 million new displacements associated with disasters were recorded in 2018. However, a large part of climate-induced migration and displacement happens internally in the countries vulnerable to climate change, thus making internal migration an important factor when discussing climate-induced migration.

Cases of climate-induced migration

First, is the island nation of Kiribati located in the Pacific. The lowly developed country is threatened by the rising ocean as most of the population is living only a few meters above sea level. The country's drinking water and food supply are in danger, and drought has only increased the problems at hand. Even a sudden reduction of greenhouse gas emissions cannot stop what is happening at Kiribati and the inhabitants do not have the resources to protect their houses and their land or to migrate to protect themselves. Kiribati is a clear example of how climate change drives migration.



On the first picture is a part of the village Eita on Kiribati, and on the second picture, it is clear, how the rising tides have a very dramatic effect on the country and its inhabitants.

Second, is the Federal Republic of Somalia located on the Horn of Africa. The country has very weak governance systems due to 28 years of internal conflict between different clans. Like most African countries, Somalia does not have strong measures in place to adapt to climate change, despite receiving assistance from the United Nations Development Programme. 81 per cent of the Somali people live in multidimensional poverty, according to the 2010 Human Development Report¹, whereby they experience “acute deprivation” in health, education and standards of living. The country is highly vulnerable to current and future impacts of climate change, as livestock and agriculture form the basis of the population's livelihood, and more than 70% of the population's basic needs are dependent on a regular climate. Additionally, the country is vulnerable as it is coastal, low-lying, poor and disrupted by war, and six million people face starvation, making it necessary and urgent to understand the role of climate change.

Somalia has always been prone to drought and crippling heat, but due to climate change, the number has increased. The increasingly poor rain seasons have triggered major food crises in the last couple of years leading to starvation and malnourishment. In addition, Somalia experienced a great disaster in 2018, when the storm Sagar caused deadly floods, which destroyed crops and housing in several parts of the country.

Furthermore, climate change feeds the armed conflict in Somalia, as it boosts the ranks of terror-groups, increases tensions between clans, and increases migration. By 2016, at least one million Somalis were internally displaced, around 300.000 Somali refugees live in the

¹ <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/eastern-africa/somalia>

Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya, and by June 2019, the drought caused the displacement of 760,000 people.



Left: The Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya. Right: The slum in Dhaka during summertime.

Third, is the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, which is a riverine South Asian nation with a population of around 165 million people. One-third of the population lives along the southern coast, and most of the country’s land area is no more than 11m above sea level. Bangladesh is no stranger to natural disasters such as tropical storms and floods, as more than one-fifth of the country can be flooded at once. The rising temperature is currently increasing the number of droughts and severe floodings, in addition to boosting the runoff from glaciers in the Himalaya Mountains, which again leads to an increase in flooding and riverbank erosion. Additionally, the rising sea-level is pushing salt-water into coastal agriculture areas.

Nearly 700,000 Bangladeshis were displaced on average each year over the last decade due to natural disasters, and up 400,000 low-income migrants already arrive in Dhaka every year. Most of the people who flee the vulnerable coastal areas arrive in urban slums, particularly in Dhaka. The city is a bastion of economic opportunity but is also filled with risks, such as vulnerability to floods, extreme poverty, public health hazards and human trafficking. In addition, government officials do not want to improve the living conditions, in fear that the residents in the slums will become permanent residents.

Government officials revealed that the country is aware of its vulnerability to climate change, but that not enough has been done to match the scale of displacement and urbanization, thereby removing any prospect of a humane life for one of the world’s largest populations of climate migrants. Most climate-induced migration in Bangladesh is internal, yet the country faces a double migration crisis, as people who flee into Bangladesh, are moving into areas highly exposed to climate change, whereby they risk further displacement. An example is the Rohingya refugees, who are fleeing from prosecution in Myanmar.

Issues concerning definitions

Media is constantly using the phrase “climate refugee”. However, this term does not exist in international law, and the term is neither recognized by the UN nor the EU even though developing countries have encouraged the EU to do so.

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, *a refugee is a person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted on grounds related to race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and are unable to seek protection from their home countries.*² Thus people displaced because of the effects of climate change are not covered.

Many organisations argue that the term “climate refugee” posed a threat to the UNHCR, as it blurred the boundaries between refugees and migrants. In official documents organisations like the IOM use the terms “persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change” and “climate-induced migrants”. It has been suggested to rewrite the Refugee Convention to include climate-induced migrants. However, experts have warned that it could weaken the protection of regular refugees because of the current anti-immigration atmosphere in several Western countries. Many countries are having a hard time providing proper protection for refugees and giving an extra burden will risk diluting the efforts so that no one will get adequate support.

Countries should recognize the basic differences between migrants and refugees. For this reason no one solutions will fit both. They are in different situations and need different kinds of support. Just including climate-induced migrants in the definition of a refugee will not solve the problems such migrants are facing.

Questions a resolution should answer

The issue of climate-induced migration has two main aspects. First, the need to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters and thus reducing the necessity for climate-induced migration. Secondly, the need to protect and help those who are still migrating because of climate change and natural disasters. Recognizing that the two aspects are very much intertwined, the committee is asked to develop a sustainable framework addressing both.

The committee should consider the following aspects:

- Reduction of climate change and natural disasters as a driver of migration
- Protection of human rights for climate-induced migrants
- Ways to reintegrate climate-induced migrants into home countries when possible

Past resolutions and discussions

The High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006 marked the starting point of modern discussion of migration within the UN. Since then, several resolutions have been passed, however, the most important are The New York Declaration

² <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

for Refugees and Migrants (A/RES/71/1) and The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. (GCM) (A/RES/73/195)

In adopting the New York Declaration, member states reaffirmed their support to an international system dealing with refugees and migrants and their commitment to protecting refugees and migrants and support countries affected by large movements of migrants. The New York Declaration also outlined the process to formulate and pass the GCM. The GCM was signed in December 2018 and adopted by a huge majority at the UNGA. It lists 23 objectives to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration. They include border management, fair treatment, and collection of data.

The GCM has however caused controversy in a number of countries partly related to the recent refugee and migrant crisis in Europe. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Poland and the United States voted against the document and still, others didn't sign it at the conference in Marrakech in December 2018. Hungary leads a group of countries arguing that the GCM is inherently pro-migration and thus against the country's strict immigration policy. These countries also took issue with the many references to human rights within the GCM arguing that this could hinder effective border control viewed necessary to national stability. The opposition towards the GCM is believed to reduce the impact of the document as international consensus and cooperation are very important to solve migration issues.

The UN has also adopted resolutions aiming to reduce the consequences of climate change and natural disasters. For the Committee the most important are the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with climate change impacts (FCCC/CP/2013/10/Add.1(decision 2)) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. (A/RES/69/283). They set out 1) to reach a better understanding of disaster management, 2) to strengthen disaster response from governments and other stakeholders and 3) to better prevent damage from disasters.

Organisations relevant to the topic of climate-induced migration

There are several international institutions and organizations that are currently discussing and finding solutions to the problems. These efforts can be used as a basis for the resolutions of the committee when discussing this agenda.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration within the UN. It is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration and works with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

In regards to persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change, the IOM strongly believes that any possible resolution should have a human rights approach. However, the organisation argues that the current debate on establishing a climate refugee status can lead to a narrow debate and provide only partial solutions to address the complexity of human mobility and climate change. Furthermore, the IOM argues that reducing the problem of climate-induced migration to be about climate refugees fails to acknowledge key aspects of

climate-induced migration.

Firstly, Climate change is mainly internal, and many climate-induced refugees do not move cross-border and do not seek protection from other states or at an international level.

Secondly, migration is not necessarily forced. Thirdly, it is difficult to isolate environmental and climatic reasons to migrate from conflict and economic, social, and political reasons. But arguably the most important reason the IOM does not support including climate-displaced persons under the 1951 refugee convention is that it might have the opposite effects on what is sought as a resolution.

- Firstly, creating a special refugee status for climate-displaced persons can lead to the exclusion of people, who are in need of protection because of many factors and are not able to prove a link to environmental factors.
- Secondly, it might weaken the refugee status to open the 1951 Refugee Convention, which would be tragic given that so many people are in need of protection.
- Additionally, creating a new convention will probably be a lengthy political process, and many countries might not have the willingness to do so.

The United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR is the UN refugee agency and is currently providing protection and assistance for many people forcibly displaced by the effects of climate change, in addition to their usual work. The UNHCR's work on climate change consists of:

- Providing legal advice, guidance and development of norms to support the enhanced protection on the rights of people displaced in the context of climate change and disasters.
- Promoting policy coherence between different countries and organizations.
- Research to fill the gaps that support the organisation's operational and policy work.
- Field-based activities to address internal and cross-border disaster displacement. The UNHCR works to reduce the environmental impact of refugee settlements and ensure sustainable development in response to displacement.

The UNHCR has had a pioneering role in raising awareness of the need to address protection for people displaced in the context of disasters and climate change as a driver of displacement. The organization argues that climate change typically creates internal displacement before it reaches a level where it displaces people across borders. However, the UNHCR also acknowledges that the refugee criteria from the 1951 convention or broader refugee criteria of regional refugee law may apply in certain situations. An example could be in Nexus dynamics, which are defined as situations where disaster or adverse effects of climate change interact with conflicts and violence to cause cross-border movements.³ An

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https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html?fbclid=IwAR310LIEsHpweXzcRwdvLZThiVTuJGPvfLok3ZvNduZWT_CU_J9_5luZwfo

example of a nexus dynamics is Somalia, where the severe drought is related to armed conflict, which results in either internal and international displacement.⁴

Marrakesh Political Declaration

The Marrakesh Political Declaration is an example of a regional solution and approach to the challenges posed by climate-induced migration. The declaration is a part of the Euro-African dialogue on migration and development and is signed by some African countries and all EU countries, with the exception of Hungary. It identifies the need to adopt coordinated responses for the management of migration. Furthermore, it recognises the growing relevance of migration issues in Euro-African and Intra-African relations in particular. The Marrakesh Political Declaration has a regional and a human rights-based approach and aligns the Marrakesh Programme for 2018-2020 with the five domains of the JVAP:

- Development benefits of migration and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement
- Legal migration and mobility
- Protection and asylum
- Prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings
- Return, readmission and reintegration

Nansen Initiative

The Nansen Initiative is an intergovernmental process that addresses the challenges of cross-border displacement in the context of climate change and disasters. The initiative was launched by Switzerland and Norway in 2012 on the basis of paragraph 14 (f) of the Cancún Outcome Agreement in December 2010 (COP16). This recognized climate-induced migration, displacement and relocation as an adaptation challenge. The Nansen Initiative is a state-led consultative process. It works to build consensus on a protection agenda addressing the needs of climate-induced migrants. As most climate-induced migrants are not recognized as refugees, they are not under international refugee law. Furthermore, human rights law does not address the need to protect basic human rights for climate-induced migrants.

The Nansen Initiative was founded because of the need for a more coherent approach to the protection of climate-induced migrants. It does not seek to develop new legal standards, but its outcomes may still lead to new laws, soft law instruments and binding treaties, as it might be taken up at domestic, regional and global levels.

⁴ see case 2

Bloc positions

The issue of climate change and thus also climate-induced migration has a divide between developed countries responsible for much of the greenhouse gas emissions and the developing countries which are most affected by climate change. The developing countries impacted the most by the effects of climate change will hope to receive funding from richer countries to prevent damage from climate change. Some will also hope to receive aid to combat the disasters they are already affected by. This group includes the countries mentioned in the case studies: Bangladesh, Somalia, and Kiribati but likely also Costa Rica and Chad.

A 2019 report from the U.S Government accountability office and offices in other developed countries have found that foreign aid agencies have not done nearly enough to combat climate-induced migration in developing countries. Therefore, some developed countries will be willing to provide aid and technology to developing countries greatly affected by climate change. This group includes many Western countries like the US, Germany and possibly Norway.

However, other developed countries will not support a pro-migration resolution as these countries already struggle with a burden of migrants and refugees. Hungary and Italy belongs in this group and might find an ally in Iran, who are hosting a large number of refugees. Furthermore, countries heavily reliant on industry and industrial development will not be willing to reduce or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions without technology and resources to assure further industrial development, as the wellbeing of their citizens is equally important to green development. China and countries in a similar situation belong in this group.

An additional bloc of countries with members of both developed and developing countries will argue that national sovereignty is of utmost importance and will not support any resolution which infringes upon this right of nations. This group might also argue that the responsibility of protecting the rights of climate-induced migrants is the responsibility of their national governments, and that the UNGA should not make resolutions on how these migrants should be treated within their national borders. This group includes countries like USA, China and Russia.

Sources and further reading

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https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/20180503_declaration-and-action-plan-marrakesh_en.pdf

<https://unfccc.int/news/human-mobility-and-the-paris-agreement>

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Cases

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<https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/eastern-africa/somalia>

<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/climate-change-is-feeding-armed-conflict-in-somalia>

<http://www.so.undp.org/content/somalia/en/home/ourwork/drought-response.html>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/01/climate-change-drives-migration-crisis-in-bangladesh-from-dhaka-sundabans/>

Do look at these links if you want facts about the countries contributing the most to climate change.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/16/climate-change-champions-still-pursuing-devastating-policies-new-study-reveals> or

<https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/science-and-impacts/science/each-countrys-share-of-co2.html>